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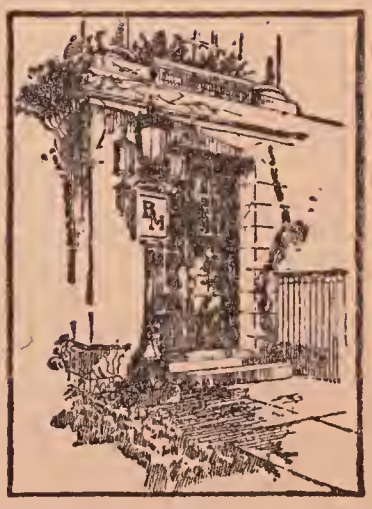
GOING TOGETHER



The back door-steps are my style, if you want to know

Going Together

By

LOUISE DUTTON

Author of

THE GODDESS GIRL, THE WISHING MOON, ETC.

Frontispiece by

JAMES H. CRANK

INDIANAPOLIS

THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY

PUBLISHERS

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Printed in the United States of America

PRESS OF
BRAUNWORTH & CO.
BOOK MANUFACTURERS
BROOKLYN, N. Y.

MAR -5 '23

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To

My Grace

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GOING TOGETHER

GOING TOGETHER

I

THE DREAM-TREE

A HORSE-CHESTNUT tree stood at the southwest corner of the lawn. You loved it. You saw it every morning when you waked up—wide waving branches, high as your bedroom window; the slender trunk, with the slant that you liked, the big beautiful velvet leaves. You climbed into it on sunny afternoons, with a book that you did not read. You sat under it on the grass until bedtime, on summer nights, and looked at the stars. Main Street would be just before you, with all the street lamps lit, two lines of them, marching straight down to the shops and the ice-cream parlor and Post-Office Square. Behind you, across the little empty lawn, was the house, with one light in a window up-stairs, and a dim red-shaded lamp in the library

below. And above you and all around you, shutting you in alone and safe and still, was the dark of the tree.

It was a beautiful tree, twelve years old too, and your twin, transplanted the year you were born. Nobody else knew what its right name was, but you knew. You had always known. There was a song in the *Children's Garland of Verse*—not a real song, for it had only words and no tune, but you could make a tune, a sleepy tune, like a very old cradle rocking:

Sleep, baby, sleep.
Thy father guards the sheep.
Thy mother shakes the dreamland tree—
Down falls a little dream on thee—
Sleep, baby, sleep.

That was the song, and the song was about this tree.

You would not shake the tree and make the dreams come down too fast; you never looked at Christmas presents before Christmas. But high in the tree was a smooth and shiny place that you could never quite reach. It was close above when you looked up, but it was always just ahead when

you climbed. That was the heart of the tree, and it was there that the dreams were—all the dreams.

All the dreams. They were up there now in the dark. How many? A dream for every leaf? You could not count them. You did not want to. You put your head against the trunk and closed your eyes. Little-girl dreams that you could not dream much longer, big-girl dreams, and those other dreams that you would dream some day, when you were that other thing which you were not yet—a woman. You would not shake the tree, but the dreams would fall some day, one by one, like leaves. You could not stop them. They were all your dreams.

"Half past eight, Sally Belle," mother called to you from the house.

Mother did not know why you loved this tree. Nobody guessed. They would laugh. And you did not think of it much. But down in one little place in your heart you never quite forgot. You always knew. Now, in the dark, you put your face against the smooth cool trunk of your tree and kissed it. The tree was a dream-tree.

II

THE TWELVE-YEAR-OLD KID

PIG PLUMMER was coming across the lawn from his house next door. He was whistling *The Georgia Camp-Meeting.* Pig had a beautiful whistle, high and clear. His white sweater looked very white in the dark, and in the dark you could not see what a fat little boy he was. Pig came every night after supper. He knew she was there, but Sally Belle held her breath and sat very still under her tree. Pig stopped on the other side of the hedge and looked down at her, and poked his head forward in the way that he always did.

"Sally Belle. Sally Belle Smith," he said; then, "I spy!"

"Don't always call me that."

"What?"

"Smith. It sounds silly."

"It's your name," said Pig firmly. "Can I come over?"

"I don't care."

"I don't have to come."

"Nobody asked you."

"I've got something to tell you."

"I've got something to tell you," replied Sally Belle calmly, not interested.

"Yes you have!"

"Well, I have. Come on, if you're coming."

Pig came. He pushed through the hedge and sat beside her, leaning against her tree.

"I've got something to tell you," he began again.

"Oh, don't talk. I don't feel like talking. Not —not to-night."

"If I can't talk can I whistle?"

"I don't care."

This was the way you always talked to Pig. You said little things that sounded like quarreling, but were not quite; the same things over and over. Pig had always lived next door. His father kept a grocery store, but it was the big one, next to the post-office in the square, and his mother had two girls, a cook and a second girl. Sally Belle's mother did her own work, but her father was Judge Smith. Pig used to chase her and pull her hair when they

were children, but they were in grammar school now. They were seniors and would be in high school next year. Pig sat behind her in school and carried her books when she asked him to. When he was not trying to be funny she liked Pig, and she really had something to tell him; something wonderful. She had known it all day, since breakfast, and she had told nobody yet.

Sally Belle hugged her knees tight with both arms. She was wearing her plaid winter school dress and her mother's old golf cape, but her legs felt long and very cold. It was a pleasant shivery cold. This was May, and to-morrow would be the first day of June. It would be Saturday, and it would be something else. Sally Belle half closed her eyes and looked through her lashes all up and down the street. This made the lights mist and dance. The street was beautiful to-night. The Palace Hotel, just opposite, looked like a real palace, splendid and dim and big. Up the street the Sewalls' porch lantern glowed like a blazing fire. Down in the square the band was beginning to play. It was playing *The Blue Danube Waltz.* The

Franklinville High School Concert and Ball was to-morrow, and Sally Belle was going.

"Penny for your thoughts," Pig said.

"My thoughts are my own."

"Feeling pretty good to-night? Anybody left you money?"

"When they do I'll give you half, Pig."

"Thank you for nothing!"

But Pig was pleased. Pig liked her, and she liked Pig. He would be pleased about the ball. Last year she and Pig had watched the people going into Odd Fellows Hall. The year before, she was in bed when the ball began, but she could hear the music.

The ball! There was nothing like it in Franklinville or the world. In winter Franklinville was little and cold, with double windows and storm-doors and bankings and snow and arctics and winter flannels—all wool, and they scratched; but in summer it was full of pleasant things, picnics and muslin dresses and hammocks and flowers, and they all began with the ball. After it, summer was there. The graduating class gave the ball, but everybody

went. Both the Franklinville dressmakers made clothes for it for weeks ahead. Dresses were sent for from Franklin Center, from Boston. Carr's Greenhouse sold out, and sent away for flowers.

Sally Belle was going alone. Her father would escort her, and the Sewalls would keep an eye on her.

Mr. Sewall was her father's partner, Lillian Sewall was her best friend, and Jud Sewall was in the graduating class, and floor manager at the ball. It was enough to go like this; it was enough just to go. To get inside those closed doors, where anything might happen—to be there, at the ball.

"Sally Belle."

"That's my name."

"Don't you want to see what I've got to show you?"

"No. . . . You can whistle, Pig Plummer, but don't sing." Low muttering sounds, not entirely unlike *The Georgia Camp-Meeting,* were proceeding from Pig.

"My throat's my own," he protested faintly, then was silent again.

He felt quite nice and warm beside her, and it

was colder now. By this time supper was over even at the Sewalls', where they had it at seven and called it dinner. Jud was harnessing up to take the oldest Carr girl buggy riding; there were lights in the Sewalls' barn. Now three girls, then two more, walked slowly past on their way to the post-office and trilled to Sally Belle. The street was waking up, as it always did after supper.

And now, passing so quickly that Sally Belle scarcely saw them, though she stared after them hard, came six girls on bicycles.

They swung grandly round the corner of High Street and swept down Main Street, over the river and up the hill, out of sight. They passed in a wide-spread even row. They wore white things that showed in the dark. One girl laughed as they passed. They were six, but they looked like more; girls and girls in the dark; a white army of girls.

"Freaks," muttered Pig jealously.

"Freak yourself," replied Sally Belle promptly, but the six needed no defense. They were the Happy Thought Club.

Sally Belle knew them all. They were not two years older than she was. The others were in first-

year high school and Madgie Carr was in grammar, in Sally Belle's own class. But they were not like Sally Belle. They were not little girls. They were in society. They were society. Sally Belle was asked to some parties, and went; but no party was ever given without the six. It could not be. And they stayed until the end, and boys walked home with them. They curled their hair and wore high-heeled slippers and played drive whist. They called her the twelve-year-old kid. And they had, every one of them, even little Madgie Carr, a thing that Sally Belle wanted—wanted more than the ball, more than anything else in the world.

There was a thing you did, called going together.

That was what Sally Belle wanted. You went with a boy. He was your fellow then, and you were his girl. When you were old you got engaged and married. Engaged girls marked towels and napkins and had to be kissed. They never had any fun. Being engaged was stupid, but going together was beautiful. You had fun then; all the fun there was. You were not an odd girl. You were not left out. You could go to straw rides and barge rides, where there had to be even numbers. You

could belong to a crowd. You had somebody to walk home with you, pay for your ticket at shows, send you valentines, candy at Christmas. You were—well—going together.

Sally Belle did not know how this beautiful thing began. When you got engaged the man proposed to you. When you went with a boy, what happened first? Did the boy walk up to you after a party and take your arm, and say, "Please, may I see you home?" Or ring the front door-bell and call on you? Her friends just opened the door and said her name. Who would the boy be? All the boys were going with somebody else, or were little boys, like Pig. Would it be an older boy? A boy in long pants? A boy from away? She did not know much about it. You could not ask questions. That was not fair. You had to wait and see. She would have long to wait. She was only the twelve-year-old kid. But when it came it would be the beginning of everything. It would open the doors of the world.

A boy from away. That would be very romantic. That would be best. He would come to town on the late train. It was due now, at the Falls. He

would come on a night like this, and she would be sitting here. He would drive down from the station in the hotel hack, and look out of the window and see her, and say——

"I don't have to sit here. Not all night."

"You don't have to sit here at all, Pig."

"My room is as good as my company," Pig suggested bitterly.

His voice sounded funny and high. He was really angry, poor Pig. Sally Belle felt sorry for him. Where would he go nights after the new boy came? Where would he go to-morrow night? He would not have anywhere to go. He would miss her, but he would be pleased. He was her best friend, except Lillian. He would be pleased about the ball.

"Pig, I'm sorry. I'll talk now."

"Who to?"

"You. Pig, I have got something to tell you. Something nice. You can't come here to-morrow night."

"Can't, hah? Who says I can't?"

"I do."

"The ground's free."

"I won't be here."

"Maybe I don't want to come. Maybe I've got a date to-morrow—a date with a girl."

"Don't be silly. I won't be here, because—because, Pig"—Sally Belle drew a long lovely breath, and then said it—"Pig, I'm going. I'm going to the graduation ball."

"To—the—what?"

"The ball."

"Yes you are!" said Pig weakly.

That was all he said. He leaned forward and put his elbows on his knees and dropped his head in his hands and sat very still. Sally Belle watched him calmly. He was surprised, of course. When her mother told her, at breakfast, she could not finish her cakes. But in a minute he would tell her how pleased he was. She wanted him to tell her.

"Lost your tongue?" she said softly.

He had slouched forward into a kind of heap. He was not whistling now. He was not moving at all. She pulled at his sleeve, but he pushed her hand away.

"Pig."

"Well, what's eating you?" he said without lifting his head.

"Pig, don't you feel good?"

"Sure."

"Did—didn't you hear what I told you?"

"I've got ears."

"Pig, aren't you glad?"

"Much you care."

"Why, I do care, Pig. I do."

"If you don't I can live."

"Pig, don't be mean to-night. Be nice to me."

"Oh, you!"

Pig got up and stood looking down at her. He stood with his feet wide apart and rocked back and forth in the way that she did not like, and poked his head forward. Suddenly Sally Belle could not see his face. There were tears in her eyes—hot tears. She winked them away. Pig was teasing her, trying to hurt her. He was not her best friend. He was not her friend at all.

"You're crying!"

"I am not!"

"You are. You always do. Cry-baby!"

"I hate you!"

They were both on their feet now, staring through the dark as if they could see each other plain. Sally Belle's hands clenched. She would never forgive Pig—never.

"Cry-baby! You can't go to the ball, a kid like you. They won't let you in. Who you going with?"

"That's my business."

"With a girl? With some other kid girl?"

"Not with a girl."

"A boy?"

"That's telling."

"What boy?" Pig's voice sounded thick, as if he were going to cry himself, only boys did not cry. "No boy would go to a dance with a kid like you. No boy would dance with you. I wouldn't."

"You won't get the chance."

"I don't want it. I've got a date to-morrow night."

"Who with?"

"Not a kid like you."

"Don't you call me that! Don't you dare!"

"Kid! Twelve-year-old kid!"

"You're fat," said Sally Belle wildly. "Fat—fat—fat!"

"Kid!"

"Harold Plummer, you go home!"

Pig turned without another word and walked away from her. He did not walk very straight. When he stepped through the hedge a long branch flew up and hit his face. He broke it off and began to whistle very loud. He crossed his lawn and walked off down the street. You could hear the sound of his whistling die away:

A meeting took place
Of the co-o-lored race—
Way down—in Georgia ——

"I don't care," said Sally Belle out loud; "I—I—I don't care."

She did care. She cared very much. There was a lump in her throat and her eyes felt hot and her knees felt weak and trembly. Pig had spoiled the ball. He had spoiled everything. She hated him. She stood still and looked after him and tried not to cry. Then she dropped down on the grass and

cuddled her cape tight round her and hid her face in it. After all, this was only a quarrel, a quarrel with Pig, and she had them every day. Pig was gone, and she was all safe and quiet, under her tree. The band in the square had stopped playing. The street was very still. She was all alone in the street, all alone in the world. She wanted to be. And the ball was coming nearer, nearer every minute. And that other thing, the big and beautiful thing that she wanted most in the world, was coming a little nearer too.

Far-away up the track she heard a faint shrill sound. It came clear through the evening air; the late train, leaving the Falls. It would soon be here. She sat up and watched. The street looked empty and lonely. It felt late. The Palace Hotel looked as far off as the stars, and the stars looked very bright, like real gold or fairy gold. Suppose the new boy should come on the train to-night; a tall slender boy with light curly hair and blue eyes. He would drive past and look through the dark at her and say ——

"Half past eight, Sally Belle."

Mother was calling from the house. Sally Belle

put both arms round her tree and hugged it tight and said just two words.

They were beautiful, like a song, though she said them very softly:

"Going together."

III

THE BALL

"Happy, Baby? Will you save me a dance? People don't dance with their fathers? I see. Wait down here for Lillian and don't go inside till she comes. She'll be here soon. The world is yours. Sure you're happy? Then, good luck."

Father was leaving her on the steps of the hall. He held her hands tight, then dropped them and walked away very fast and did not look back. Father was very slender and tall. She was proud of him and he had little jokes with her and nobody else. He was sweet. But she was glad he was gone, for now she was really here and nothing could stop it.

The day was over; morning at school, short like a dream, a nap when she could not sleep, meals she could not taste, and getting dressed to go, which was worst of all. Mother made her turn

round to be looked at, and took stitches and put in pins and basted a tuck in a petticoat and caught her powdering her nose with cornstarch and rubbed it off.

"I don't care what Lillian does; this is your nose," she said; and: "Keep your skirts pulled down and don't dance more than twice with the same boy. Evening parties are all wrong. They put boy-and-girl nonsense into children's heads, and I can't have that. Father spoils you. We ought not to let you go."

But she was here. She had on her white dress, and her braids were looped up with pink ribbons. She had fifty cents to pay for her ticket. She held it tight in her hand. She was at the ball.

She drew back against the wall, out of the light from the doorway. She was happy, of course, but she did not feel happy yet; only excited and afraid, like before you spoke pieces at school. Things were happening fast, and making a great deal of noise.

The hall was the center of the world. It was just half-way down Main Street; below was the square, then the bridge across the river, then Schoolhouse

Hill, sloping up and away, mysterious with scattering lights; above was upper Main Street, her own house, near, though just now it felt so far off; then the station lights, and Carr's Hill beyond, where there were no lights at all. And down both hills and from dark little side-streets, from everywhere, people were coming to the hall. They came all at once, so that you could not watch them.

They came in pairs, arm in arm, and whispered and giggled; in groups, and laughed loud and talked. They came in buggies, in a buckboard that rattled down Schoolhouse Hill, with girls sitting in each other's laps, and boys standing on the steps; in the Carrs' automobile, the only one in town. The horn was out of order and they were blowing a tin Fourth-of-July horn. Madgie Carr wore a pink worsted fascinator with crystal beads.

Some of the boys waited outside the hall and smoked, but the girls all hurried in, holding their light skirts high. They went up the dusty, dimly lit stair to the hall above, and the lights and flowers and music. The band was tuning up; Higgins' Orchestra, but they had a new violinist from out-of-town; perhaps he made that long, clear, wailing note.

Across the street on a high stone wall a row of little boys swung their feet and whistled and watched. She had sat there with Pig last year. Now she was grown up and going.

Lillian was late. They were not coming so fast now. One of the double doors was shut. The band had stopped tuning up and was playing real tunes up-stairs. The crowd round the door was thinning out, and she could see boys she knew: Tissue Doyle, Stubby Giles. They would both dance with her. She did not expect to dance every dance. If you did not have a fellow you could not. Jud had the first dance with Minna Carr and the second with Lillian, but he would give her the third, and find some one to take her on for the first dance, the Grand March and Circle. He had promised.

Freeman Foster, Jud's friend, stopped to stamp out his cigarette and saw her and spoke to her.

"Hello, kid. Does your mother know you're out?" he said.

"I—I guess so. Free, will you dance with me?"

She ought not to have asked, but she wanted to know. She was afraid of Free, but she liked him.

He was dark and tall, almost as tall as father. He looked very tall to-night.

"Sure."

"Will you dance a round dance, Free?"

"If I've got one. I'll look at my card. See you later. You'd better get a move on, kid."

Lillian was very late, but she had promised to wait and it was pleasant out here. All the boys had gone in and both doors were shut. You heard the music very faintly. It was beautiful. It was something in march time, something that Sally Belle knew. What was it? It stopped, and there was laughing and clapping; then it went on again. What were they doing up-stairs? Making out dance orders? It did not matter. She sat down on the steps. This was her ball. They were getting it ready for her. Pig had said that no boy would dance with her, and Free would, and Free led his class, and was going to teach in high school next year; every one would dance with her.

Pig would not speak to her in school to-day, and she did not know where he was to-night. She did not care.

Free was too old for her, of course, but perhaps when the new boy came, the boy from away, her boy, he would look like Free, and have dark hair, not light.

It was very pleasant out here, but how quiet it was! Where was Lillian?

She stood up and stared at the windows above her. They were corridor windows outside the hall. They were brightly lighted and stood out square and big, and no people passed them. They were all inside, in the hall. No new people had come while she sat there, not one since the doors were shut. All the little boys but one were gone from the wall across the street. He got down and walked off into the dark. Up-stairs the faint music stopped, and just as it stopped she knew what tune it was. It was the march, the High School Cadets' March, the tune for the Grand March and Circle. They played it every year. Then—then the first dance was over. The ball—her ball—had begun without her. She pulled at the big closed doors and pushed through them and ran up-stairs.

The hall door was closed and the corridor was empty. There was a table draped in rose-and-gray

bunting, the class colors, where they had sat to take tickets, but no one was sitting there. The door would not open. She knocked. Lillian had come early and was waiting for her inside. She had missed only one dance. She was not so very late. She had been here to dancing school, but she had never been here at night before. It looked different, large and strange. The floor was scrubbed and smelled of soap, but it was dusty again. The wall lamps were turned high and smelled of kerosene. She stood in a circle of bright light, but there were shadows on the stairs below, and dark shadows on the stairs above, that led to the gallery entrance. There was a noise of talking in the hall, but no music now. The noise went on just as if she had not knocked. It did not stop or change. She knocked again, but nobody heard her or came.

This was her ball and they would not let her in. Lillian had run away from her. Lillian did not want her. Nobody wanted her. She could not walk in there alone, among all those strange talking people. She could not stay out here. Somebody would come and find her here alone and late for the ball, and laugh at her. She had waited outside and

let the ball begin. Somebody was coming now. She heard steps down-stairs. She shook the door and rattled it.

"Who's there? Use side doors coming in. This door is locked," called a voice inside. It was not Jud's voice. She did not know who it was. "Chase yourself, you kids, or I'll come out and attend to you. Micky Murphy, I hear you. This will be all from you."

Little boys rang door-bells at houses where there were parties, and knocked on the windows and ran; little boys from Paddy Lane. That was what they thought she was; and this was her ball!

"It's me!" she tried to say. "Me!" But her voice would not come. There was a rattling of keys. Somebody was coming out, somebody very angry, and people were coming up the stairs. They were almost here. On the floor above it looked dark. The door was opening in front of her. She put both hands against it and pushed it shut, and turned and ran away up the gallery stairs.

Up here. Only one lamp was lighted and it was turned low. There was nobody here. The gallery door was shut. At her left, in the cor-

ner, there was a little door, which was shut, too, but not locked. It stuck, but came open, and she slipped inside. Her skirt caught on a nail and tore when she pulled it away. She shut the door tight and sat down on the floor against it. She was in the closet under the eaves. She had found it one day with Pig. It was big, though you could not stand up straight. It was full of old magazines and lantern slides and other things that you could not see now. You could not see the walls, it was so dark. She listened. Somebody came out of the hall and ran down the stairs to the street door and came back, stopping to talk to the new people who had come, then they all went into the hall again. Nobody followed her. Nobody knew she was here. There was a hole in the wall of this closet and you could see the hall through it, but she did not want to look. She sat still, crying a little.

This ball was not her ball. She hated it. She was safe, but she did not know what to do next. She could not come out, all dirty and torn, and dance, not if Free asked her, not if the boy from away came out of nowhere and found her. She did not want to dance, not ever again. But she could

not go home. Not yet. She might meet some one on the stairs. What would they say at home if she came back so soon? She could never tell them that she hid in here. She could never tell any one. She would have to stay here a long time—until the ball was done.

She stopped crying and sat up and found a pile of newspapers and pulled them under the peep-hole and kneeled there and looked at the ball.

It was all there. She and Pig had worked at this hole and made it bigger. It was round, like a picture frame, and the picture was the whole ball. People danced off into corners, out of sight, but they had to come back again. You could not see faces very plainly, but you could see lovely colors, pink, rose and blue, pale and soft, like flowers. You could see bits of wall, draped with bunting, and part of the stage, banked with green, and the orchestra, sitting behind it, just as if they did not have any legs, and their arms going back and forth when they played. You could see everything. You did not get tired of looking. You could not look away. It made you dizzy to look, but you rested and looked

again. You could not tell how long you had been looking. You looked and looked.

The people down there were not like real people at all. It was all like a show set going for you to see, as if you played with dolls and they came alive. One girl had a white ruffled dress and a shiny pompadour. It was Lillian. How pretty she was! She was waltzing with a tall dark-haired boy, but it was not Free. Free did not seem to be there at all. Madgie Carr's green dress was too bright. Her blonde curls bobbed when she danced. A new dance was starting now. The floor filled with people pushing one another about, then they straightened out into two long lines, facing each other. Late couples crowded in. The benches along the walls were empty. Everybody danced this. It was a contra dance.

She had never seen one before. They were not taught at dancing school. They were old-fashioned and common. But this one was beautiful. The music was queer, but you liked it. It got into your head and stayed there. There was not much tune to it, but there was a splendid swing, a steady beat,

like a big watch ticking. Old Higgins, the orchestra leader, called off. He was a funny little man, with pink cheeks and waxed mustache, but he did not look so funny standing up there very straight in his tight black clothes. His voice was big. You could almost make out what he said, up here. They all did just what he said, the same things over and over, as if they would go on forever and not stop. It looked silly, but you wanted to do it too. You felt as if you were doing it. Your feet moved. Your heart beat hard and you had to put your hands on it.

"Swing partners!" You held your partner very tight, and went round and round, with your hair flying and your skirts sticking out. Then the two lines got all mixed up and you got lost in them, then they came straight and you swung down the center with a splendid rush, as if nothing could stop you. And then you swung partners again. That was the best of it. It looked wonderful—so light and free. The girls' faces got very red. They laughed. She could hear Madgie Carr's laugh. It was very shrill and high. She loved this dance.

It stopped and she dropped down on the floor, away from the peep-hole, and put her head on the

newspapers and shut her eyes. She was tired, just as if she had danced. Another dance began, a waltz, but she did not want to watch. The waltz was some very old tune; the music whispered and sang; it was very sweet. All the noise of the ball, the music and talking and calling, sounded pleasant up here—a big noise, but dull, like the sea a long way off. But the ball was up here too. It was everywhere. Couples were sitting out in the gallery, more and more of them all the time. When you kept still, like this, you could almost hear what they said. Once or twice steps had come up the gallery stairs and gone away again, and there had been talking out there. Some one was out there now. She heard the floor creak and smelled cigarette smoke. She lay very still. She heard more steps on the stairs, and then two voices talking. One voice she did not know, but the other voice was Free's.

"Ah, there!"

"Greetings. What's the idea, Free? Holding your own hand? Wake up and join the ladies. This is the second extra."

"Sure it is. I had it saved for a kid. She asked for it. Now I can't locate her. That lets me out."

"Oh, you cradle-snatcher!"

"Well, she's a good little kid. . . . Say, listen here. Old Higgins wants ——"

They moved away, so that she could not hear, then off down the stairs. She curled up on the newspapers. She felt very comfortable. If she were at home she would sleep now. Free had saved her a dance. He did not know that she was not there. He did not miss her. But she did not mind that. She did not mind anything. Things looked bad, but they would get better. They always did. The waltz music was sweet, but it was hard to hear. It was faint and kept getting fainter. She could not hear it at all.

This ball was not her ball, but it was beautiful.

She rubbed her eyes and sat up. She knew at once where she was, and came wide awake all at once, but she had slept. She had gone to sleep in here and she had slept a long time. The floor was very hard and the newspapers smelled musty under her head. She felt rested all over, but stiff and sore. She looked through the hole again. She felt frightened at first when she looked. The big room

was empty. The round frame was there, but the picture was gone. All the gay-colored dancing people were gone. Windows were open to air the hall, and the bunting flapped in a little breeze that was coming in. It looked wilted and dirty; rose and gray were ugly colors.

What did it mean? Was the party over? People slept all day sometimes when they were too tired and nobody waked them. How long had she slept? Pig said there were mice in here. Sometimes people got shut up in places like this and died, like the bride in *The Mistletoe Bough.*

But she could hear sounds down-stairs, and now a small squeaky sound that came from the hall—from the stage. Old Higgins was sitting there all alone, tuning his violin. His collar was wilted. He looked tired and very old indeed. She remembered now; this was the long intermission for supper, and this year supper was served down-stairs in the library and reading room. The two rooms opened into each other. They were the whole ground floor. Everybody was down there now, eating, but if Higgins was tuning up they would be back soon.

This was a good time to go, and she must go now.

She took one last look at the place where the ball had been.

"Good-by," she said out loud, and old Higgins looked straight at her across the hall, just as if he heard. She got the closet door open and gathered her torn skirt round her and held it high, and went out into the silent corridor and down to the closed door of the hall. She tried to go quietly but boards creaked under her feet. The lights hurt her eyes after the dark of the closet. She stood still. In the supper rooms below they were not making much noise but they did not hear her. Nobody came out. She could get away. She did something without knowing why. She untied her handkerchief and took out the fifty-cent piece that was knotted there and laid it on the table by the hall door. It was all by itself there, looking quite bright and big. The money box was gone. She went on down the stairs and out, closing the doors gently behind her. She had been to the ball.

IV

AFTER THE BALL

It seemed a long way up the street. She hurried, but her feet felt heavy. The wind blew cool in her face and felt good. She could hear the town clock striking over on Church Street and it sounded farther off—miles away. It was striking ten. She had never been out alone so late at night before, but things looked just the same. The Palace Hotel lights and the Sewalls' porch lantern were burning last night and they were burning now. She was glad to get home. She would tell father and mother all about the ball; she would have to, but she would tell every one else that she was sick and could not go. She would tell father first. He would be home soon. She would wait under the big tree for him.

Her own front yard looked just as it always did. Up in her corner room a lamp was lighted and both windows were open for a cross draft. The white

ruffled curtains were blowing. It was dark on the lawn and darker under the tree, black velvet dark. She crossed the lawn and stood looking down into it. Something moved there. Some one was sitting there. Had she dreamed the whole ball? Was it last night instead of this? He was sitting there just as he always sat, hunched into a kind of heap, with his head poked forward. He made room for her but did not speak, and she sat down beside him. It was Pig.

"Hello. You here?" she said.

"No, I'm in Africa. What are you doing here? Ball over?"

"No. What are you doing here?"

"Nothing."

"How long have you been here?"

"Since eight," said Pig in a loud cheerful voice.

"What for?"

"For nothing. Can't I sit here if I want to?"

"I don't care."

"I don't have to sit here."

"Yes, you do. Pig, I want you to. I—I'm glad you came."

She was glad. He looked little and funny and fat, and it would be awkward explaining about the ball, but she was glad to see him. She wanted him to be there. She moved close to him. He felt warm beside her, and behind her she could feel the firm strong trunk of her tree.

"It's nice here," she said.

"Was—was it all right?"

"What?"

"Oh, the ball." Pig asked as if he did not care very much, but his voice sounded low and a little queer.

"The ball was lovely," Sally Belle said firmly.

"What made you come home early?"

"I thought I would. I—I felt sick. I feel better now."

"Did you dance every dance?"

"Yes."

"Extras?"

"Some."

"Who with?"

"Oh, everybody. Free Foster."

"Who else?"

"I don't know."

"You'd better know. You didn't dance all the extras with Free?"

"Yes," said Sally Belle recklessly, "I did. And the supper dance too. He—he said I was a good little kid."

"I'll knock his block off."

"Harold Plummer!"

"I will. Fool! Stuck-up prig! Teaching school next year. I'll teach him!"

"What—what for?"

"Fool! Can't get a girl himself, and then thinks he can dance with another fellow's girl. Thinks he can dance with you, when you and I are going together."

"You and I are what?"

"Going together. I speak English, don't I? I came over here last night to get you to go to the ball with me. They told me I could go and take you. They gave me the money and I came right over to show it to you. You wouldn't let me ask you. You said you were going. I wouldn't go without you. I had to get dressed up and pretend to go. I can't go home till it's over. I've got to stay here."

"I didn't know that."

"You know it now. I'll knock Free Foster's block off. And I'll never speak to you again."

Pig did not mean that, but he acted as if he did. He did not speak to her again. He did not speak at all. He did not move. He just sat there, angry. Well, he had talked enough. What things he had said! She put her arm over her face and turned away from him, against the tree. She felt tired all over, down to her toes, more tired than she ever had been. Everything that had happened to-night was all wrong. Everything else was all wrong and everything hurt her. She did not know what hurt most. She wanted to cry and she could not cry.

She could hear Pig breathing hard beside her. He wanted to make up. In the tree above her she could hear the wind blowing the leaves, making queer little crying noises, like somebody dying a long way off. It was only the wind, but the boy from away was dead. She would never see him. Down in the hall they were playing the oldest and sweetest waltz of all. She heard the last strains of it, very faint, as if it were dying too.

The ball was a beautiful ball and she had been to

it in a beautiful way. Nobody had ever been to a ball like that before. Nobody would ever know just how beautiful it was. It was her own secret, all warm in her heart. She felt for Pig's hand and found it and held it tight, then she turned and looked at him. Even in the dark he looked fat, but there was something nice about the way he poked his head forward. Nobody else did it. She liked it.

He was not angry now. He was ashamed, and he was afraid to speak until she spoke to him. Poor Pig.

"I'm all right," she said.

"You crying?"

"No."

"You can cry if you want to."

"I don't, Pig. You're not mad now, are you?"

"No."

"Pig, I didn't go to the ball."

"You didn't?"

"No. I'll tell you all about it sometime. I don't want to talk about it now. You don't care, do you? And you won't ever tell that I didn't go?"

"Cross my heart."

"That's good. . . . Pig, did you mean what

you said just now? That you and I were—you know—going together?"

"Sure."

"Do people know it?"

"Sure."

"Madgie Carr?"

"Sure. She's getting up a whist club, and going to ask you and me to join."

"She is? Pig, how long have we been ——"

"Oh, always."

"We—have?"

"Sure."

"Oh!"

There was silence under the tree. Pig's hand felt hot and Sally Belle drew hers away, then she put it back again. Across the street the lights of the Palace Hotel were going out one by one, like stars. You could hear no music now, but the lights in the hall still burned. You could see them through the trees. They looked very far away. Sally Belle sighed.

"Well, Pig," she said, "I'm glad we are."

"Glad we're what, kid?"

"Going together."

V

T. O. A. K.

The Three of a Kind Club was meeting with Madgie Carr. It met Saturday afternoons at two, and Sally Belle was late; but she stood before her dresser, with the high tilted mirror, and looked up and in. The dresser and the things in her room were all large and dark and old, but the mirror was beautiful. It was set deep in the frame so that you looked far in. The glass was blurred and dim, and it was loose in the frame and moved while you looked. It moved just enough, like something that was alive and could not quite keep still. There was snow on the lawn outside and snow on the long bare branches of the big tree near the window. The sun was bright on the snow, and made little wavering patches of light on the clouded glass. They twinkled like candlelight.

Sally Belle was a small, soft little girl with a fuzzy red tam and a shaggy coat and skirts that

were an inch shorter than her best friend Lillian's, and brown hair in two long fat braids that would not curl or stay straight. She was the youngest freshman in high school, but you could not see all that in the mirror; you saw just a face—a dim vague face that smiled at you and looked at you. It was your face and not your face.

If you half closed your eyes and looked it might be a stranger's face, the face of somebody almost beautiful, somebody quite old—eighteen. It had pink cheeks and round bright eyes.

"Eyes Like the Sea," whispered Sally Belle. That was the title of a book she had never read. "Was—was this the face that wrecked a thousand ships?" she added after a minute.

That was a quotation, she did not know from what, but she loved it. Now she came close to the mirror and made her voice very low, so that she hardly heard it, and shut her eyes when she spoke, because the next words were so hard to say, so solemn, almost like swearing.

"Walter," she said then—"Walter Clark, dear Walter, dearest, my dear," and again, for she liked the sound of it: "Dear—dear ——"

She listened. Mother was safe down-stairs making cake for the village-improvement meeting. She jerked open the dresser drawer; not the top drawer—mother opened that too often—but the third drawer, the one that stuck, the underclothes drawer. It was packed tight with things in neat piles, ugly winter things made of heavy long cloth and trimmed with Hamburg edging instead of lace. Under them was a blue sachet, scented with orris instead of real scent. Under that was white printer's paper; under that a layer of newspaper; and under everything else a collection of small scattered objects—a stiff cabinet photograph, tintypes, two Japanese napkins, a paper rose. She groped among them expertly and pulled out a small red book. She held it against her heart and looked into the mirror and sighed deeply; then she opened it and began to read, turning the pages tenderly, and whispering phrases and words to herself. You could not say them out loud—they were too sweet.

"When the lamps are lit in the mirrored room, Walter, my Walter ——"

The book was bright red, like blood—heart's blood—with a small red pencil tied to it that was

worn to a stub already. It was a memorandum book, and it was an advertisement for common-sense shoes. There was advertising printed on half the pages, but she had pasted them together two by two, so that only blank pages showed. She had written on almost all—on the first page, at the top—"Saw him," and under that a list of dates. Some of the dates were starred. The stars meant "Saw and talked with him." After the dates came pages of writing, cramped and close, but neat. Pig had given her the book last week out of his father's store. Since then no eye but hers had seen it; not Lillian's, not Madgie Carr's. It was her book, her very own. On the cover in silver letters was the motto for the shoes—what they printed on the boxes to sell them; but under it she had written something else in white ink:

Humanity Requires It.
i. e.—some outlet to my emotions.

It looked quite neat and very beautiful.

"When the lamps are lit in the mirrored room—gloom—perfume—tomb," said Sally Belle. That was not a quotation. It was a poem—a poem she

was writing herself. Two months ago she had never written a poem, and now this book was half full. She chewed the red pencil hard.

"Doom," she began doubtfully, "bloom, groom, bridegroom ——"

She stopped and closed the book tight. Mother was coming to the foot of the stairs.

"Have you gone?" mother called.

"No."

That always seemed a silly question to ask, and any question, any talk at all, drove the poems away. But they always came back, and the next line would come, too, though it was coming so hard. She kissed the book solemnly, once, and tried to push it into her coat pocket, which was too small for it. You could not hide things in your bosom when your clothes all buttoned in the kiddish way that her plaid dress did. You could not hide things under the rug—it was sweeping day. And the dresser drawer would not come open. She pulled her skating bag down from the closet door and dropped the book in with the skates and knotted the draw string. The book would be safe, and perhaps—just perhaps—she would show it to Lillian

—Lillian, not Madgie Carr. When the poems were printed they would be dedicated to Lillian.

Mother was calling again. She swung the bag over her shoulder and hurried down-stairs. Mother stopped her and looked at her.

"Your cheeks are flushed. You ought to be out in this nice fresh air," she said. "What were you doing up-stairs so long?"

"Nothing."

"You have your skates. That's right. You and Marguerite Carr and Lillian spend too much time in the house. Let me see the bag. It wants mending."

"No!"

"No what, daughter?"

"No, I thank you. I can't wait. I'm late to the club."

"What club?"

"The T. O. A. K."

"What does that stand for?"

"Nothing. It's the name of the club. A—a club's got to be named."

"What is your club for?"

"Nothing. It's a club, that's all. It's a secret club."

"Don't you want to tell secrets to your mother?"

"I can't. I promised. Can I go now?"

Mother sat down on the stairs and folded her hands upon her apron.

"Sally Belle," she said, "I tell father we ought not to let you go to this Clark boy's party."

"You promised."

"That is not a nice thing to say to your mother. These Clarks are new people. They have not lived here two months. Mrs. Clark is active in church work, but she wears very large hats. Mr. Clark has good manners, but there is no room for an insurance agency in Franklinville. And this boy Walter ——"

"It's his birthday party. He's fourteen. And it's not till two weeks from to-night. And you promised. You did! Oh, mother!"

"This boy Walter is too old for you. So is Marguerite Carr—an affected little girl. Now Harold Plumber, or Pig—why will you call him that?—is a nice little friend for you. He just drove past in a sleigh. If he had seen you he might have given you a ride. Mother likes you to play with little

boys, you know—play with them sensibly, just as if they were little girls."

"They aren't."

"What's that, dear? Don't mutter. Enunciate clearly. You are a good little girl, but you are a very secretive little girl. All the Smiths are secretive. You are like your father. He says you are passing through a phase just now which is harmless but painful while it lasts, like grippe or the measles. You are certainly very nervous, and you get excited about little things. But I shall talk with your father about this party. Run along now and get some fresh air."

"Yes, mother."

"I don't like this club of yours. I shall be glad when it breaks up."

Sally Belle shut the door gently behind her. If you banged it mother called you back. Mother was sweet, but she talked too much. If you did not answer, but just said yes and no in the right places, she stopped sooner. While she talked Sally Belle had been watching for something. She opened the storm-door a crack and looked, then started out of

the yard and up the street. She saw it then, but it was too late to go back. She stood still and waited. A sleigh was coming toward her down Carr's Hill. It was a small yellow sleigh with loud jangling bells and a large high-shouldered white horse. The horse was Queen Bess, the sleigh was the Plummers' sleigh, and a fat little boy was driving. He wore a red toboggan cap and a blue Mackinaw, both too tight, so that they made him look much fatter, and he was very angry. You could see that a long way off—he sat up so straight. He drove up and stopped and raised the fur robe to make room for her, but did not speak.

"Hello!" she said. "Hello, Pig! Going riding?"

"Me? No, I'm going after blueberries. Get in."

"Pig, I told you I can't go riding to-day. You don't have to get mad. I've got another engagement. I can't!"

"Going skating?"

"I may and I may not."

"Yes, you are! I know where you are going, and Tissue Doyle knows, and Stubby Giles knows."

"Let them! It's no disgrace."

"Well, I can take you there, can't I? There's no

law against it. You've got to get there. You can't fly."

"No," said Sally Belle uncertainly.

"Get in here. I've got a bone to pick with you."

Sally Belle sighed and slipped into the warm place beside him. He tucked her in very tight and started Queen Bess up Main Street, clucking very loud to her. He looked straight ahead as he drove, and his eyes looked large and round. They always did when he was angry, and his chin wiggled. He could not help it. It was wiggling now. There was a quarrel coming, but it had to come sometime. They turned into High Street, where it was clear of snow and good for trotting, and Queen Bess always walked. Then Pig spoke, very slowly and solemnly:

"I'm not mad. I'm hurt."

"What hurt you?" Pig had stopped as if he had nothing more to say.

"Hurt, that's what I am. And I won't stand much more."

"Pig, I don't know what you mean."

"Stubby Giles and Tissue Doyle and I won't stand much more. That's what I mean. Stub won't stand much more from Madgie, Tish won't stand

much more from Lillian and I won't stand much more from you. When a fellow is going with a girl he has got some rights."

"Who says he hasn't?"

"He—he wants the pleasure of her society. When a girl won't hardly talk to him at recess, but stays in the cloakroom with girls and giggles and won't come out—when a girl stays cooped up all Saturday afternoon doing the Lord knows what, and calls it a club ——"

"It is a club."

"What's the name of it?"

"I won't tell you."

"What do you do at it?"

"That's our business."

"Will you let Stub and Tish and me join?"

"We can't. It's a girls' club. It's a secret club."

Pig's chin wiggled.

"When a fellow is going with a girl," he began, "and the girl has secrets and won't tell them and won't go riding and dodges into the house when she sees a fellow coming—and a fellow is going with a girl ——"

"If you mean you and me," said Sally Belle with dignity, "say you and me and don't talk in hints. I don't like hints."

"You," said Pig bitterly; "you and your club! Your club and your Walter Clark!"

"Pig, don't start that again!"

"Walter Clark! Sissy Clark! Smart Aleck! Fool! Thinks he can get any girl in town."

"He can."

"Has he got a girl to go with? Has he? He has not! Thinks he's too good for all the girls—too good to speak to common folks, too good to join a class in high school. Takes a special course and thinks he's in a class by himself. Walter Clark! Sis Clark!"

"If he hears you call him that you'll be sorry."

"I will, will I?"

"And if I was going with a girl and wanted to be jealous I'd take somebody the girl had spoken to more than six times," said Sally Belle calmly. "The —the one you are talking about, he wouldn't look at me."

"Will you answer me two questions?"

"If I feel like it."

"Has your club got anything to do with this Walter Clark fellow?"

"How could it? It's a girls' club."

"Have you or have you not got a crush on Walter Clark?"

"I have not."

"Will you cross your heart and say that?"

"No, it's kiddish to cross your heart."

"Will you resign from your darn fool club and promise never to speak to Walter Clark again?"

"Don't be silly!"

"Will you?"

"No!"

"This is the last time I'll ask you."

"It's not the first time."

"Well, it's the last time all right." Pig's chin did not wiggle. He made a great effort and kept it stiff and still. "Now you can take the consequences."

"What consequences?"

"I don't know," said Pig frankly; "I don't know what we'll do, but I know when we'll do it. Two

weeks from to-day, the day he's going to have his party—or thinks he is. That's when, if you want to know."

"I don't," said Sally Belle.

"Stub and Tish and I have got together on this, and Stub and Tish and I won't stand any more."

"Stub and Tish and you are silly little boys," said Sally Belle sweetly.

"All right for you, Miss Smith!"

"All right for you, Mr. Plummer!"

"Come on, Baby! Come on, Bess!"

Pig talked to Bess only when he was angry. She did not need it. She always took her own pace. She swung with a plunging lope through the cross-cut to the Carrs', brought up with a jerk under the porte-cochère and stood with her head hung down. The porte-cochère was yellow and white and large, like the house, and it was the only porte-cochère in town, but Bess never looked happy there. Pig had not spoken again, and did not help Sally Belle out. He went down the long drive and out of sight, sitting up very straight and talking in a low angry voice to Queen Bess. Poor Pig! Two months ago

she used to cry when she quarreled with Pig—two little months ago. She was a child then. She gave the T. O. A. K. whistle, one long note and two short, and opened the Carrs' front door.

VI

PARLIAMENTARY LAW

It was dark in the Carrs' front hall, and you could see the lights in the room at the end. They showed under the crack of the door. She dropped her things in a heap on the hatrack and tiptoed toward the door. It was locked; that was why they met here. No other member of the T. O. A. K. had a door that would lock. She gave the signal knock, like the whistle, one long rap and two short, then announced herself in a whisper, with her face close to the keyhole:

"Pixie!"

"Nixie and Trixie!" said a voice inside—Madgie Carr's voice, but she could make it sound quite different—mysterious and low. "Give the password."

"Constancy!"

"Lock, lock, double lock!" said the voice, and the door opened and closed quickly behind her. She

was in the Carrs' play room. Mrs. Carr would call it that still and would not put away Madgie's dolls; but she was also in the clubroom of the T. O. A. K.

Sally Belle drew a long breath of delight. What a clubroom it was! This was the seventh meeting, but she was not used to it yet. It had never been so impressive, never so finished in effect as to-day. The white hard light of the sun on the snow could not get in here. The blinds were shut and every curtain was drawn—green shades, white shades, lace curtains and heavy plush, pulled tight over all. The room was dark, so dark that things that were ugly looked mysterious instead. The blackboard, the davenport with broken springs, Madgie's dolls' house with a sheet thrown over it. It might be anything—a dead person under the sheet. The darkness was faintly lit with candlelight. There were three candles, one for each member. They were stuck on white saucers and arranged in an exact triangle on a round table in the center of the room. Inside the ring of candles were a black leather photograph frame, closed, so that the picture in it did not show, a black-covered book, closed

and tied with a black ribbon, and a pressed-glass vase in which three joss sticks were burning. The table and the three chairs that were placed at it were all draped with black; a camel's-hair shawl, an old silk wrapper and five yards of new black cambric bought with the club funds; but they were all the same black by candlelight—a beautiful dead black. Best of all, round this table stood the three members of the T. O. A. K.

Their right hands were clasped in the secret grip of greeting with which their ceremonies began, their eyes reverently fixed on the black photograph frame, their faces interesting and pale in the flickering candlelight. The girl with the small pointed face and big brown eyes and tightly curled hair was Madgie Carr—Madgie, a superior being, a leader of society, an older girl, and yet Sally Belle's own friend. The girl with the beautiful face and golden hair rolled back in a smooth high pompadour was Sally Belle's best friend, her Lillian; and the other girl was her own self, Sally Belle Smith.

Sally Belle, once the twelve-year-old kid, and still called kid for a nickname; Sally Belle, in so-

ciety now and safe in this inner circle, the envied of all society. It was too good to be true, but it was true.

"The meeting will come to order," Madgie said. The three hands unclasped, three black chairs were drawn back and the T. O. A. K. sat down. "Trixie will preside."

"It's my turn, Madgie—I mean Trixie," said Sally Belle faintly.

"Pixie is late and has lost her turn to preside," Madgie announced formally.

"Well, I couldn't help it. I had a fight with Pig. He's sore at us. Stub and Tish are too. That's why I didn't call for Lillian—Nixie."

"Pixie will come to order," said Madgie firmly, "and stop talking. Trixie will take the chair. As we are going to stop early and make fudge, I will omit the minutes of the last meeting."

"Oh, read the constitution," said Sally Belle—"I mean, Pixie moves that the constitution be read. Now, Lil—Nixie ——"

"Nixie will stop stepping on Pixie's toe," said the presiding officer. "I know every time you do it. Let her have the constitution read, Lil. She

wrote it. I've got something to read by and by that I wrote myself. Is this motion seconded?"

"I suppose so."

"Nixie seconds the motion," the presiding officer translated. She opened the black-covered book and read fast, keeping a severe eye on the other two club women:

T. O. A. K. Constitution and Charter

We the undersigned, Nixie, Pixie and Trixie, life and charter members of the T. O. A. K., or Three of a Kind Club, do solemnly promise and swear these three things:

First, we will be true to the subject of this club. We will never marry or get engaged to anybody but him till death do us part.

Second, we will faithfully note down and report every time he speaks to us or we see him, and meet once a week for the purpose of telling one another about it. We will name all four of our bedposts after him every night, sleep with a picture of him under our pillow, or a picture that looks like him if we can't get a real one, and will otherwise do all we can to show and promote our affection and respect for the subject of this club.

Third ——

The presiding officer stopped, for at this point the constitution stopped too.

"It sounds good when you read it," she said kindly. "But why don't you make up the third part?"

"I—I don't know. I'm making up—something else."

"What do we have to have a third part for?" asked Lillian sulkily.

"Things always have three. parts. You ought to know that, Nixie," said the chair severely. "That's parliamentary law. You don't know much about clubs. If you weren't in love with the subject of this club I wouldn't let you be in this club at all."

"Well, she is, and that's what the club's about," said Sally Belle loyally. "Last time she stayed all night with me she made a hole right through my picture of him kissing it good night. It was the school group, the one where his profile shows. I didn't cut him out. I sleep with it all."

"That picture is worn out, anyway, and anybody could kiss a hole through it," said the chair judicially. "The business of the meeting will proceed. Nixie has the floor."

"I don't want the old floor," Nixie replied promptly, "if you're going to nag at me, Madgie Carr, even if you are older than I am, and got up

this club. I am just as crazy about the subject of this club as you are. I made Tish drive past his house three times last night after supper. There was a light in his room, and I thought he was there. The third time somebody opened the window, and it was his mother. I've got his picture—that snapshot that's light-struck—pasted in my locket. Tish got it open and looked at it, and I had to pretend it was a picture of Tish to keep him from getting mad. Tish has fighting blood. If he really gets mad there won't be any club or any subject of the club, either. Tish ——"

"When you have been going with Tish as long as I have been going with Stub," said the chair calmly, "you'll boss him. You won't let him boss you. Nixie will come to order and finish her report in proper form."

"That's all. I was home from school sick with a cold four days last week, and did not see the subject of this club."

"Pixie has the floor. Has she any report to make?"

"No. I've just seen him, that's all—not talked to him. I've got a list of the dates. And Wednes-

day I think he—the subject— was going to ask me to skate, but I got scared and hid and then skated with Pig. Was it awful to hide?"

"It was cute of Pixie to hide," said the chair graciously. "But Pixie must learn to make her report in proper form."

"I'll fix it now if you want me to."

"Never mind. Is that all?"

Sally Belle gave one long look toward the hall, where her bag and the red note-book were. "I—yes, that's all," she said.

"Trixie has the floor," the presiding officer announced. She cleared her throat elegantly.

"Ladies of the Three of a Kind Club," she began correctly, "I was absent in Franklin Center last week visiting my aunt. I did not see the subject of this club, and I have no report to make; but I have something to read to you." With a graceful gesture she unbuttoned her shirt-waist and from this romantic hiding-place produced a folded paper. "It—it is a poem," she said.

"Well go on and read it. Don't stand there and hold it. I'll move for you to read it if you want me to," said Lillian. "What's the matter, Madgie?"

"Lil, it's a poem," said Sally Belle. "Leave her alone. She can't read it till she gets ready to. You can't, with a poem. Poems are different. They aren't like anything else. They—they're poems."

"How do you know?"

"Well I"—said Sally Belle—"I ——"

But the chair was herself again.

"This is a poem," she began. "I never wrote one before. It is short but very good. You don't have to move for me to read it. I've got the floor anyway. I will read it now," and holding the paper daintily between two fingers and speaking in her most parliamentary voice she read:

To You

Walter, depart
From the house of my heart.
Walter, Walter, you will not go.
What is it that fascinates me so?

The chair read this poem through, then waited, composed and smiling. Nobody else spoke at once.

"The meeting is open for general remarks," she said encouragingly.

"Is—is that all?" said Sally Belle. "All the poem?"

"Yes. Why?"

"I thought poems were longer."

"Some poems are. This poem isn't. I wrote it in five minutes."

"You—you can't," said Sally Belle. "I mean—this poem is good of course, but you can't write poems like that. They have to come. They don't come all at once—just a little bit at a time, and you think you heard it somewhere, then you know you are making it up, and it's a poem. I mean—I thought ——"

"Nobody cares what you thought," said Lillian. "What do you know about writing poems?"

"Nothing," said Sally Belle meekly.

"This poem is beautiful. It—it ought to be printed. Can I copy it?"

"If you care to."

"It—it's beautiful. I love it."

"Oh, Lil, you don't! Not that poem," said Sally Belle.

"Don't you want her to like my poem?" said the

chair. "Why, you're all red in the face! Are you jealous, kid?"

"Yes, she is, and sometimes I get sick of it too," said Lillian.

"Nixie and Pixie will stop fighting and come to order," said the chair. "They are crazy about each other, really, and everybody knows they are. Well, I'm glad you like my poem, and you can both copy it. We can learn it and say it out loud. If there is no further business to come before the meeting we will unveil the subject's portrait and then make fudge."

"I move the portrait of the subject of the Three of a Kind Club be unveiled," said Lillian.

"Second the motion," said Sally Belle.

"Oh, I've got a new one, girls!" the chair explained informally. "It looks just like him. It's a surprise. Ready, Lil? All right, go ahead, kid, it's your turn to unveil."

Sally Belle rose, her knees a little shaky with excitement. This was the big moment of the afternoon. It was here and it was hers.

"First in war, first in peace and first in the hearts

of the T. O. A. K.," she said. She put out a trembling hand and pulled open the black leather frame. Then as one girl the T. O. A. K. knelt down on the carpeted floor, rested its elbows on the table, put its chin on its clasped hands and looked at the picture revealed.

It was a surprise indeed. The black leather frame, which had enshrined in turn a New York matinée idol, a popular preacher and a sad-eyed young man cut from an undertaker's catalogue and wearing grave clothes, all three chosen for their resemblance to the subject, now held an authentic cabinet photograph of the subject himself. It was Walter—Walter Clark. It was a full-length photograph, and you could see all of him, even the shoes, which were pointed and very small, with the toes well turned out. A tall slender boy with clothes that looked tall and slender, too, and a small round head, a small mouth, and a short straight nose, and dark hair parted in the middle, very straight, and eyes that looked right at you. Wonderful eyes, round and full and black; eyes like the sea—the eyes, the face, that wrecked a thousand ships. They were Walter's eyes.

"Oh!" breathed Sally Belle. "Oh!"

"Where did you get it?"

"His mother gave it to my mother."

"It's handsome."

"He's handsomer."

"I feel so foolish when I do this."

"But the kid's happy. Look!"

"Hush!"

The two voices which Sally Belle had heard dimly through a dream now stopped, and silence infolded the T. O. A. K., the five minutes of silent worship with which their meetings closed. Madgie looked graceful kneeling, but Lillian's hair looked like an angel's hair. Sally Belle, kneeling between them, could almost hear her heart beat, she was so happy. They did not want her poems—they must never hear her poems. But that did not matter. Nothing mattered but the T. O. A. K. She was part of it. She was safe in it. It was beautiful. Mother wanted it to end. Pig wanted it to end. Poor mother! Poor Pig! They did not understand. Nothing could end it. It was forever.

She was going to remember this minute—remember it always. She raised her eyes and looked

straight into the subject's eyes, and her lips moved, making no sound, but speaking real words—speaking them straight to him.

"When the lamps are lit in the mirrored room," she said.

VII

IN THE MIRRORED ROOM

"Pig, I told you not to call for me."

"I'm not. It's time to go and I'm going. I've got to get there—can't fly. The street's free. If you're too good to walk with me you can walk on the other side."

"I don't care."

Pig had walked up and down outside the house, waiting for her while she dressed. She had seen him, but it was no use to say so. It was never any use to argue with Pig. He only went on saying the same things over and over until he changed his mind himself. Sally Belle fell into step beside him, crunching the hard-packed snow. It looked blue-white in the starlight. There was no moon. It was the night of Walter Clark's party and she was going.

"Club meet to-day?" said Pig.

"Yes."

"Huh!" said Pig. Then he was silent, not even whistling.

Sally Belle was not mad with Pig. They were speaking. But they were not on good terms. They had not been since a quarrel two weeks ago. Since that day nothing had been quite right with Sally Belle's world. At home mother and father had long talks about her, and stopped when she came into the room. At school Lillian and Madgie were always whispering together and stopped when she joined them, and Pig and Stub and Tish sat on the steps at recess and had secrets together, and wrote notes to one another in class instead of to the girls. Even at the T. O. A. K. things were not quite the same, though she had skated twice with the subject and her red book was almost full of poems. She had it with her now, in the pocket of her party cape. The T. O. A. K. was still the most beautiful thing in the world, but she felt lonely all the time, and afraid of something, she did not know quite what—afraid sometimes that this party would never come.

But it had come, and she and Pig were turning

into the front yard of the old Carr place, which the Clarks had rented furnished. You could see from the street that a party was there. All the front windows were lighted and the lights showed yellow and gay through the overgrown hedge. There were footprints in the snow on the walk and arctics and rubbers on the front porch, and some one was playing ragtime on the tinkly old square piano in the back parlor—playing *The Georgia Camp-Meeting.* Sally Belle's feet danced to it on the snow. She had been six whole months in society, and she was not used to parties yet. Pig stopped her outside the hedge with a fur-gloved hand on her arm.

"Listen here!" he said. "I've got something to say to you."

Sally Belle stopped under the willow tree by the gate, where the ground was almost bare, and Pig stood before her in the snow, shifting from one foot to the other.

"If you've got to talk—why, talk!" she said.

"It's not my fault," said Pig.

"What's not your fault?"

"Have you seen Madge and Lil since the club?"

"No. Why?"

Pig cleared his throat.

"Well, when you do see Madge and Lil," he said, "something is going to happen. You won't like it, and it's not my fault. I tried to stop it. I've been trying ever since you know when—that fight you and I had about you know who, that time two weeks ago in my sleigh when you got so mad. Sally Belle, if you want anything that much I want you to have it, even if it is foolish."

"If you want what thing?"

"Him. You know who. Clark. Him and your darn fool club. But I can't stop Stub and Tish. I went in with them, and I can't stop them and I can't back out. I have got to do what they want. I have got to do it now."

"Do what?" said Sally Belle coldly.

"Why, have this talk with you and come to an understanding. Stub and Tish and I agreed to before this party. Stub called Madge up on the telephone and they came to an understanding. He was round there to supper. And Tish went round to Lil's, and they had an understanding too. And now I have got to come to an understanding with you. I have got to say just what they said to

Madge and Lil. I promised to." Pig braced himself in the snow with his feet wide apart and poked his head forward.

"You girls have got to can your crush on Clark and break up the Three of a Kind Club, or Stub and Tish and I won't go with you."

"Break up what?" Sally Belle said in a whisper. "What?"

"The Three of a Kind Club." Again Pig uttered that sacred name carelessly, like any other three words. "A cute name I call it."

For a minute—or a lifetime, was it?—she said nothing more, but stared hard at a snowdrift that she did not see. It was in passing minutes, through careless phrases, lightly spoken, that hearts broke and lives were wrecked. She had always understood that, but she had never supposed it could happen to her. She had certainly never supposed that Pig could break her heart or any heart. She could hear him breathing deep with relief that a painful scene was over, then beginning to shuffle his feet uneasily.

"It's not my fault," he said.

"Oh, no!" said Sally Belle sweetly. She lifted her chin very high and smiled at him. "Is that all

you've got to say? Then suppose we go in. My feet are rather cold."

"But—but what have you got to say?"

"Why, nothing much. Who told you the name of my club?"

"I'd rather not tell."

"Lillian?"

"No."

"Madgie Carr?"

"I'd rather not tell. Well, yes. Stub got it out of her. She's stuck on him all right. Showed him the whole shooting match, constitution and all. We think of getting up a club and asking you girls to join, now the Three of a Kind Club's broken up."

"The Three of a Kind Club is not broken up," said Sally Belle.

"But Madgie's going to resign, and Lil is."

"I know it."

"So even if you won't come to an understanding with me, the club's bu'sted. You can't belong to a club alone."

"Coming to an understanding with a girl means getting your own way, does it?"

"Sure!" said Pig.

"Then, Pig Plummer," said Sally Belle, "you will not come to an understanding with me. I can belong to a club alone if I want to. There's no law to prevent me. You can't stop me, and Lil can't and Madgie Carr can't, and nobody else can."

She turned and walked into the yard and up the steps and kicked off her storm rubbers deliberately. Pig, dazed and silent, watched her and did not move.

"Nothing can stop me!" she repeated. "Nothing."

Then she rang the bell, opened the door, and holding her head high and stepping in time to *The Georgia Camp-Meeting,* which was still being played, she went into the house and straight on up the stairs.

She was so late that she was not met at the door, but she knew her way. She was not a child, she was a society woman now, and she knew society. She would need all her social training, all her poise tonight. To laugh while the world laughed with you, to smile and smile while your heart broke, that was woman's work, and she had a sacred duty to perform. It was hers and hers alone. Nothing should take it from her. For she meant what she had said to Pig. She was the T. O. A. K.

The front bedroom was the ladies' cloakroom, the back bedroom the gentlemen's cloakroom, and the hall bedroom an overflow cloakroom for late guests, all quite correct. She put her new red party cape on top of the pile on the hall-room bed. The coats, capes and sweaters were all wraps that Sally Belle knew, but they looked quite rich and strange in that many-colored heap. The little room had the picked-up queer look that all rooms had in houses where there were parties. She combed her hair with her side combs, found a can of talcum on the dresser and powdered her nose very white. Her party dress buttoned in the back, but it was a grown-up color—lavender. She felt ready to face her world. She went down the stairs to the door of the back parlor, where the party was, pushed back the red plush portières and stepped inside.

She stood still there and looked at the party. You could not see very much, but you could see that the subject's party was like no party in Sally Belle's social experience. The parlor was almost dark, and the light that there was looked softer than lamp-light and brighter than candlelight, but it was candlelight. The candles were set in Japanese lan-

terns that hung in clusters from the ceiling, on picture wires crossed from the moldings. In the bay window, with lanterns hung low on both sides of it, their light dimmed by its yellow glow, there was a big jack-o'-lantern. She had seen them before, but never so toothless and fierce. It leered at her. At first it was the only face she could see in the room, then she saw the girls huddled into a bunch on one side of the room and the boys on the other, as they always were before a party got going. They were whispering and giggling, but not talking out loud. The floor was not cleared for dancing, and there were no card tables. The only table in the room held a bowl of red apples and a bowl of pop corn. What kind of party was this?

"What do they think we are? Bunch of kids?" said a voice beside her. "They call this an old-fashioned party. Sit here, darling." The voice and the arm that slipped round her and drew her down to occupy half an unsteady chair were Madgie Carr's. Sally Belle let the arm stay around her, but sat up very straight.

"Good evening, Trixie," she said formally.

"Don't call me that any more," Madgie whispered.

"Didn't you see Pig? You aren't mad with Lil and me? That's right. Walter Clark is sweet-looking, but he is a sissy. And you have to give in to the boy you are going with when he gets mad or you can't boss him the rest of the time. And, darling, I promised not to tell, but I will. You and Lil are going to be taken into the Happy Thought Club." This select group of six older girls ruled society. "You are old enough now. I worked hard to get you in."

"Indeed?" Sally Belle was polite, but cold. "I don't know that I care to join. I can't belong to two clubs at once. I belong to one club now—the T. O. A. K." She pushed Madgie's arm away and rose. "I don't care to discuss it. I don't care to discuss anything. This party is going to begin," she said.

A boy had stepped out of the dim ranks of other boys into the yellow patch of light that the jack-o'-lantern made. It smiled at him over his shoulder, and he smiled, too, as he stood there. The party, received in twilight gloom, was getting its first look at the host. The mist that always came before Sally Belle's eyes when she saw the subject cleared away

and she looked too. She saw a tall dark boy with a small smiling mouth and small shiny shoes. It was Walter Clark, but where were Walter's clothes, his beautiful smooth-fitting Boston clothes? They were gone, and instead he wore things that were not like any clothes she had seen before. The coat was a queer shape, short and fat looking. The collar was worse. It was very wide and stuck out all round his face, so that his neck stood up very long and thin. It was finished with an unpleasant floppy bow, and it was made of paper. But the legs were worst of all—the subject's lovely slender legs. They were strangely dressed. All society was in long pants now, even Pig, and to-night the subject was in knickerbockers—knickerbockers that did not fit. They bagged at the knees. They bagged all over. Round them were ribbons with large bright buckles, and below them were black silk stockings, very thin, and you could see white underneath them.

"Sissy!" whispered the faithless Madgie, and a low whistle of surprise and delight was heard from the boys' side of the room, then excited murmurs of comment from both sides. The subject made a graceful gesture to command attention, and spoke;

and though his appearance was changed his voice was, as always, very refined, very clear:

"I am pleased to see you all here, and I hope you will all enjoy the evening."

"Thanks, teacher," said a respectful voice—Tissue Doyle's—and the subject turned toward it graciously.

"I am not supposed to represent a teacher. I represent a boy of our grandfather's day. As you all know, this is an old-fashioned party. We are going to play old-fashioned games. The first on the program will be Going to Jerusalem, the next will be Clap In and Clap Out and the next will be Post-Office. After that refreshments will be served. We will then have an old-fashioned spelling match. If you don't know any of these games I will explain them to you." The subject waited, but nobody spoke. "You all know them? That's fine. Then we can begin. I'll show you how to fix the chairs."

There was a long dreadful pause, but at last, as if at a signal, the groups at the two sides of the room broke up and merged. Chairs were pulled into place down the center of the room. Madgie Carr struck up the High School Cadets' March on the

piano, hitting false notes in the dark, but banging out the tune very loud, and the game began. Walter Clark had insulted society, but society had swallowed the insult. It never played games now. It was too old for games, but if the host insisted it would play to-night. Once, twice and again a procession wound round the row of chairs, stopped, scrambled for chairs and then marched as before. It was a long procession, and in the gloom it looked longer. Except when accidents happened, it marched in grim silence.

"Sweet light to crack your shins in."

"Don't mind a little thing like that. I just tore my dress."

"Girls, this is some party!"

Stub, in a high falsetto, was trying to be funny. Sally Belle, at the tail of the procession, knew that society was angry. She knew, but she did not care. For heading the long line, stepping daintily in the dark, the subject walked before her. His face looked paler than other faces. You followed it like a light. She would have followed it anywhere.

It was not his fault that they did not like his party. She liked it.

"We ought to keep on till all the chairs are gone," the subject said at last, "but some of us seem tired. We will start Clap In and Clap Out."

In the old times, when society played games, Sally Belle had liked this game. It was so quiet and restful, and the beginning was mysterious like Christmas, though you knew just what would happen. You waited in the hall with the other girls until the boy you were going with called you in to sit on the floor in front of him. You sat down in front of the wrong boy once and got clapped out, then guessed right the next time he called you and sat still and watched the game. She was the first girl called to-night. She did not want to stay with Madgie and Lil, so she sat down at once on a large soft cushion in front of Pig. The boys laughed at her, of course, for guessing right so quickly.

"Hello, my lady, whose black baby are you?" they called to her out of some coon song, and "Oh, you Sally Belle!"

"You can lean back against me if you want to," Pig said under cover of the noise.

"I don't care to," said Sally Belle coldly.

Then Stub called Madgie and the game went on. Madgie guessed wrong three times, and most of the girls did. It was a long game, and Sally Belle was glad. Sitting there, she could watch the subject all she liked and he would not know it. His costume was very funny, but he was not. He did not know that they did not like his party. He was a man of the world, a perfect host. He was wonderful. She could have watched him forever. But the last girl sat down and the game stopped. Sally Belle's foot was asleep. She rubbed it and rose. Pig tried to speak to her, but she turned her back on him. Tish moved toward her through the crowd as the game broke up and drew her into a corner.

"Lil wants to see you," he said. "She's out in the hall."

"I don't care to come," said Sally Belle with dignity. "Lil can come here if she wishes to speak with me." Tish laughed. He always laughed at Sally Belle, but she liked him.

"Lil is as sore as the deuce," he said, "because you won't get out of the T. O. A. K. Have some sense! Take my say about Clark! Don't fight with your

best friend about him. He's not good enough. Look at his get-up to-night! Would a he-man wear it? Look at this whole darn-fool party!"

"Tissue Doyle," Sally Belle said, "I don't care to discuss my host with you when I am a guest in his house. And I don't care to discuss the subject of my club with you when you don't belong to it. I belong to the T. O. A. K." Tish gave her a long queer look, as if he liked her and did not like her, both at once.

"Girls are the deuce," he said. "Well, if to-night won't cure you I give you up." Then he went back to Lil.

Sally Belle did not talk to anybody else. She could not. They were clearing the room for the next game and rough-housing a little while they did it, throwing apples and getting into fights and singing. The party had got going. It was the enchanted hour that she liked best at parties, but she could not enjoy it or watch it. She and Lillian had never gone to bed mad with each other, and they would to-night. She had quarreled with her best friend. It was a great price to pay, but the subject was worth it. Now, indeed, he was hers, and nothing

could take him from her. The room was ready soon and there was a rush for seats. The subject stepped into the middle of the room and clapped his hands for silence.

"Post-Office," he announced. "The office will be in the front parlor. I will send the first letter. Mr. Plummer will tend door. Do you know how to, Plummer?"

"I can make out to," said Pig in a gruff voice.

He got up and went with the subject to the folding doors between the two parlors and stood there a minute talking to him, then the subject went into the front parlor. Pig shut the doors behind him and stood alone. His arms hung straight down at his sides in a kiddish way, and his eyes looked large and moist. He had never looked more unhappy. His chin wiggled. He tried to speak, gulped twice and spoke.

"Sally Belle Smith," he said, "the office is open. There is a letter for you."

"In—in there?" said Sally Belle.

"Sure! Go on in—no, in Post-Office Square." Different voices said: "Lost the use of your legs?" "Lost your tongue?"

For the moment Sally Belle had. She did not know this game. She had never played it before or seen it played. But she knew that the subject had singled her out from them all for some honor. He had chosen her, Sally Belle Smith. He had chosen her now, in this hour when she had been tried and stayed true to him. She rose, crossed the room and brushed past Pig into the lighted room where the subject was.

Pig banged the doors shut behind her. She leaned back against them and felt for the door-knob, and found it and clung to it. Her knees felt weak. She could not see the subject or anything else in the room. Then she saw him. He was standing by a center table with a red-shaded lamp on it and looking at her. She could not see his face very clearly. It was only a white blur with dark eyes, but he was smiling at her—she could tell from his voice when he spoke.

"Scared?" he said.

Sally Belle shook her head.

"Ever play this game before?"

"No."

"Glad I called you?"

"I—I——" Sally Belle choked.

"You are scared! And you are a kid, but you are a very nice little kid and I like you. Want your letter?" Sally Belle nodded. She could not speak. "Come on over here."

Sally Belle let go of the door-knob and stood up straight and came forward to where the subject was and stood in front of him, waiting and holding out her hand, but he did not give her the letter. Instead he did a queer thing. He put his arm round her waist.

"Where's the letter?" she said.

"Take it now, or wait till you get it?"

His arm felt like your partner's arm in the first position for waltzing, but she did not want to dance, and it was bad manners to hold your partner tight. He was holding her very tight. She could smell the musty smell of his old-fashioned coat. She hated it.

"You let me go!" she said.

"Here's your letter."

She tried to push him away, but she could not. He held her tighter and put his face down close to hers. His face felt smooth and soft like Lillian's. Then before she could stop him or guess what he

meant to do his mouth touched her cheek. He kissed her.

He let her go and stood looking down at her, and she looked up at him. The kiss had been in the middle of her left cheek. She put up her hand and rubbed it.

"Like your letter?" he said. "You can have another one if you will call me out by and by."

This game was a kissing game and the kiss was the letter. She had been kissed by a boy. Nobody had ever kissed her before but her own family and Lillian. And the boy had a baggy suit and a long scraggly neck and a silly smile and a high squeaky voice like a girl's voice.

"What's the matter? Don't you like to play this game? You can have another letter now if you want one," he said. He came toward her. Words came into Sally Belle's head and she said them.

"Sissy! Fool! Smart Aleck! Dude! Don't you ever speak to me again!" she said.

Then without a backward glance at the subject of the T. O. A. K. she walked out of the room. She went through the hall and up-stairs. She went straight to the little room where she had left her

cape. It had a door that locked. She shut it behind her and locked it. She had the room to herself, and nobody had seen her go to it. She could cry if she liked, and there were some tears in her eyes, but she did not want to cry. She just wanted to be alone, and she was. She looked round her. The bed was full of wraps and the matting on the floor looked hard and cold.

She found her own red cape and spread it on the floor and lay down on it.

A terrible thing had happened. She did not know why it happened, but it did. It happened just now down-stairs when the subject kissed her. She had not understood that life was like this, that a lovely thing you had made yourself could die in a minute for no reason. What could comfort you? What was there left in the world that was beautiful at all? The subject was not the subject any more. That was the thing that had happened. He was a strange boy who had kissed her, a boy she hated. There was no T. O. A. K.

Something hard in the pocket of her cape hurt her, and she pulled it out and looked at it. It was her little book with her poems in it. It was a dear little

book. She had loved it. She loved it now. She put it under her cheek and lay down again, petting it. She did not feel very sad. Great griefs stunned you; you could not feel. She was resting and comfortable as if she were going to sleep. When you wrote poems the best ones came just before you went to sleep. Lines, phrases, lovely words would slip into your head and stay there—whole verses sometimes.

Sally Belle turned on the floor, which was getting hard. There was a mirror in front of her and a lamp on the bureau under it: a glass hand lamp, turned low, so it gave a pretty light. She might get up and see how tears looked on her face, only her tears were all dry. She lay still and watched the light in the mirror. The party down-stairs was making more noise now. Somebody laughed very loud. There was a feeling that came when you wrote poems, a prickly feeling all in the roots of your hair. It was like nothing else. She had not felt it for weeks.

Somebody was coming up the stairs and stumbling in the dark, somebody looking for her. She lay

still and held her breath, but he would find her. He always did. He stopped outside her door, tried it and found it was locked, and stood there, shifting his feet and making the floor creak. He did not dare to knock.

"Hello!" she called. "Hello, Pig! How did you know I was here?"

"I didn't. I looked every place else first. You crying?"

"No."

"They're having refreshments down-stairs. Brought them in just after Clark called you out. They didn't play any more. They don't know you're up here. They're all eating. Want some ice-cream?"

"No."

"It's peach and chocolate mixed. I could get mine, too, and bring it up here and eat it with you."

Sally Belle sighed, but it was no use to argue.

"All right," she said. "Oh, Pig, have you got a lead pencil? Mine's broken."

"Sure."

She got up, went to the door and unlocked it and

opened it a crack. A hand slipped through, holding out a small stubby lead pencil. She took it and shut the door.

"Oh, Pig——" She stopped. Even now this was a little hard to say. "Pig, I don't belong to the T. O. A. K. any more. It was a silly club. I don't want you ever to mention it to me again."

"You don't?" Pig stopped talking, but did not go. The floor creaked and he breathed very hard indeed. He wanted to tell her something.

"All right," he went on at last in a hoarse whisper. "But you can belong to it if you want to. I won't stop going with you. I—I can't. It would take more than the T. O. A. K. to break up you and me."

"That's good. Now go along, Pig."

Pig went. She heard him go down the stairs. She had just time enough. The pencil was dull, but it would work if you wet it. She opened the little red book at the one blank page and balanced it on the bureau and turned up the lamp. She spoke rapidly and softly, out loud:

"When the lamps are lit in the mirrored room,
The air is full of a sweet perfume.

Low laughter rings on the perfumed air
And I think of you. Will you never care?
Waking or sleeping, your face I see ——"

There was more of it. She had it all now. This was the poem she had always liked best, but she could never finish it before. She could finish it now. It had just come. It was a beautiful poem, and this was a beautiful minute. She was going to remember it always. She wet the pencil between her lips and began to write.

VIII

IN SOPHOMORE ROW

A SMALL pink note lay on Sally Belle's desk. She opened her eyes and saw it, and folded her hands over it and sat up very straight and looked round her. She was a sophomore now—she had been for almost three weeks—and she sat in Sophomore Row, in the middle of the high school assembly room, with Junior Row and Senior Corner behind her, and all the freshmen in front. She loved this room. The recitation rooms up-stairs were little and dark, but this room was sunny and big and very old. It was the court room, and this building was the court-house before the new brick one was built. The white pillars on the porch in front were beautiful.

And she loved this time of day. It was three, and school would close in half an hour; but nobody seemed to know it. They all sat still, as if they meant to sit there always, like the Sleeping Beauty's

courtiers in the wood. The hands of the funny old clock, with the red boat always sailing, did not seem to move at all.

Sally Belle sat just under the clock. Pig Plummer sat behind her. He was studying history and whispering dates to himself, the same dates over and over. She could hear them all, the room was so still. The principal was holding a Latin-prose class up-stairs, and Freeman Foster was at his desk, keeping order. Free was the youngest assistant. He was saving money to go to law school, and reading law in her father's office, so she ought to marry him when she grew up. But he had a girl in Franklin Center. Perhaps he was writing to her now—he was writing fast with a fountain pen. His face was pale and his black hair was shiny and smooth. He looked beautiful, writing. The room looked beautiful, all in a golden haze of chalk dust and September sun.

Madgie Carr sat in the sunniest window. Her curls were made with curl papers at night, but they looked real. They looked like the golden curls of a princess in a picture. Her little white face was not like a princess though. It was like a witch or a fairy

—a wicked fairy. She was looking at an atlas, open in the wrong place, and pretending to study, but she had written the pink note. It smelled of her Flower-of-the-World perfume. It was folded in the shape of a boat. Sally Belle opened it and read it. It was short:

Ruby: Walk home with me. Get rid of Pig and Diamond. Must see you. PEARL.

Madgie Carr's name was Marguerite, and "marguerite" meant "pearl," so Madgie was Pearl; and Lillian Sewall, Sally Belle's best friend, was Diamond, and Sally Belle was Ruby. They were secret names—to sign notes with. Sally Belle tore up the note, hid the pieces in her pencil box and sighed. What was she going to do?

She had promised Madgie to make up her mind to-day, and it was not made up. Back in Senior Corner a row of chairs ran along the wall for special students studying out—in school for recitations only, and not needing desk room. All the chairs were empty but one, and in that chair a boy was sitting. She turned and looked at him. He was hunched over a book and reading. He had big

square shoulders and a blue-serge suit and a bright-red tie and yellow hair brushed straight up and back like a girl's, but rough like a boy's hair. He looked up and smiled at her. He had nice white teeth and blue eyes. She liked blue eyes. He was Augustus Carr, Madgie's cousin. He lived at the Falls, but was boarding at Madgie's for the winter and coming into the sophomore class when he had tutored with Free. He was a handsome boy. She looked over her shoulder at Pig.

Pig was not handsome. He had lost two pounds in the summer, but he was fat. His face always looked round and red when he studied hard. It was very red now, and had a pencil smudge on one cheek; and his forehead was damp, so his dark hair curled in rings. He was wearing out his summer shirts. His mother made them. They had attached collars like a little boy's. He had on a pink one to-day. He was copying out his dates in an uneven column on ruled tablet paper, and wetting his pencil to make it write black and big. Pig's eyes were brown. He was not handsome at all. But she did not know what to do.

Well, if you could not think what to do you just

did something and did not try to think. Sally Belle opened her atlas, held it high, settled down in her seat and shut her eyes. Life was hard, complicated, but it was pleasant too. Only last year she had crushes, slept with boys' pictures under her pillow. Now all that was past. She did not have crushes. She was not in love.

"'To-day I look into an empty heart,'" she whispered. It was a line from some poem she had read. There were women who never loved. She would be one; give her life to some great cause—women's rights, perhaps—or write novels; she had a plot for one. And already she had a woman's problem to face, to settle now, to-day. It was pleasant in Sophomore Row.

Free rang the first bell for closing. Closing time happened suddenly and fast, though the last half-hour was so slow. The golden quiet of the room was gone all in a minute. There was a shuffling of feet and a banging of desk lids. Free put his letter in his pocket and smiled to himself. It was a letter to his girl. He rang the second bell, and long lines filed out and scattered at the door. Sally Belle slipped into her place and marched sedately; then

pushed into the crowd round the cloakroom door and out with her red tam in her hand. Lillian was inside adjusting a new white tam deliberately. Pig, in the cloakroom across the hall, was struggling patiently with a broken shoe lace. Madgie was waiting behind a pillar on the porch. She put an arm round Sally Belle's waist and hugged her in the patronizing way that Sally Belle did not quite like.

"Good kid!" she said. "The crowd's going round to Lil's. We can walk there slow and talk."

They linked arms and started down Schoolhouse Hill. A long procession walked with them—all the school, for the few who lived on the Hill Road above the schoolhouse did not count in society. At the foot of the hill ways divided and you walked up Main Street under spreading maples and elms, or east and west into smaller and shadier streets; but down the short slant of hill and over the creaking board bridge that crossed the little river you all walked together. You walked in a solid phalanx, leaving the empty white schoolhouse up on the hill behind you. Sally Belle liked this walk, and she was proud to take it with Madgie. Madgie was president of the Happy Thought Club and the Whist

Club. She led society. She was queen of all Sally Belle's set. She was hard to get on with if she did not get her own way, but she almost always did. Sally Belle was proud of her, but sometimes she was afraid of her too. She was afraid to-day. The procession had reached the foot of the hill. They dropped back to the rear of it and walked slowly, keeping step.

"Well?" Madgie said.

"Well what?" said Sally Belle nervously.

"You know what."

"Yes, I do know," said Sally Belle. "I do. You want me to stop going with Pig and go with Augustus Carr. Is that it?"

"Yes. Will you do it? Of course," Madgie added elegantly, "it makes no odds to me what you do."

"No, of course not," said Sally Belle humbly.

"I think a good deal of you, and I like to see you do the right thing, that's all."

"Madgie," Sally Belle took a long breath, cleared her throat and went on quite firmly, "now, Madgie, —Pearl,—I don't know that I care to do this. You see, it's this way: You were good to fix it up for

me. I appreciate it. And I'd just as lief do it as not. I'd like to. But it would be hard to do, and—and I don't see much point to it, Pearl."

"Why, Sarah Isabel Smith!" said Madgie sadly.

"Well——"

Sally Belle stopped. It was no use to argue. Madgie would only talk more, and everything she said sounded true when she talked, and she talked so fast you could not think of good answers.

"Have I or have I not been over all this with you? Didn't we talk till twelve last time I stayed all night with you? Can't you see Gus has got to have a girl? And he could get other girls. He can't wait for you forever. He needs a girl to take to the chowder at camp next week."

"Well, why has he got to have me?"

"He likes you. I don't know why. You are a kid, but he likes you. Don't you like Gus?"

"I guess so. I haven't talked to him, only once or twice at recess."

"Gus is my own second cousin, once removed," Madgie began eloquently. "He lives at the Falls, but his mother keeps two girls and his father owns the woolen mill and part interest in the shoe factory.

Gus is a cute fellow and he says cute things, and he's a smooth little dancer. Pig can't reverse, and he steps on your toes in the schottish."

"I know," said Sally Belle.

"Of course," said Madgie sarcastically, "if my Cousin Gus isn't good enough for you——"

"Oh, he is," said Sally Belle. "But—but——"

She walked on more slowly, looking hard at her boots.

"I'm going with Pig," she said after a minute. "I went with Pig last year and the year before. I—I never went with anybody but Pig."

"Then it's time you did."

"Why?" asked Sally Belle weakly.

She knew why well enough. She was tired of hearing all this, very tired; yet it was all true. Madgie was right. They were half-way up Main Street now, with the shops behind them and front lawns and houses ahead. They were walking west, straight into the afternoon light. It was golden light to-day and the maple leaves were red gold. Sally Belle stared up at them and sighed.

"A girl," Madgie said, "can't go with the same boy too long. When a girl and a boy have been

going together a year they ought to break up. If you let one boy hang round too long it looks as if you couldn't get anybody else, and after a while you can't. No other boy will go with you. You don't want to be known as a girl that can't get but one boy."

"No," said Sally Belle doubtfully.

"And if you keep on going with the same boy till you grow up, what happens? You either get engaged to him and marry him or you don't, and you have to be an old maid. You don't want to be an old maid, do you?"

"No," said Sally Belle. She shivered. She was fourteen already—almost fifteen. "But Lil and Tissue Doyle have been going together two years," she argued, "and you and Stub have."

"I went with two boys before I went with Stub, and I may make a change before long, though I'm not telling that yet. If you don't want Gus you can get somebody else. I'll help you. But you and Pig ought to break up."

"I know it," said Sally Belle faintly. "But—but——"

"Take your time. It's your funeral," said Madgie.

"If I did break up with Pig, how would I do it?"

"That's easy. Be cold to him for a while, then give him a hint that you're tired of him, then turn him down when he asks you to go some place, and then go some place with Gus. That's all."

"Pig can't take hints, and I can't do all that. I don't want to. If I do break up—if I did—I'd want to do it quick and get it over."

"You can do it next week at camp," said Madgie promptly. "Drive out with Pig, and begin to be cold to him. Act cold to him all day, and drive home with Gus at night. You can do it all in one day. Is that quick enough?"

"Yes," said Sally Belle, "but I don't want to hurt Pig's feelings. Pig's sensitive. Pig——"

"Ruby," said Madgie severely, "have you got a crush on Pig?"

"A crush?" said Sally Belle. "On Pig?" she laughed. "Why, no! But I don't want to hurt his feelings. He treats me right. And I like him, all right. I like Pig."

"Pig will think more of you if you can get some other boy."

"He will?"

"All boys do. Boys are like that. And he can go with some other girl."

"What girl?" said Sally Belle quickly.

"Oh, any girl! You don't care what girl, do you?"

"No."

"That's all right then." Madgie seemed pleased. "Then it's settled."

"I——"

"It's all settled," Madgie repeated brightly. "You'll do it."

"I don't have to just because you tell me to, Madgie Carr. It's a free country."

"But you want to do the right thing."

"I suppose so."

"Then that's all there is to it."

"Is it?" said Sally Belle.

She pulled her arm out of Madgie's and stood still. They were far up Main Street now, just across the street from her own house.

Nobody was in sight there. Mother was safe in the kitchen, making a pan of fudge for Sally Belle. She could not see Sally Belle walking with Madgie. Mother did not understand Madgie. She never had,

and she did not now, though Madgie was Sally Belle's great friend.

"She is a polite little girl," mother said, "but I do not trust her. She may put ideas into your head."

Father understood Madgie better; he understood everything better, though mother was very sweet. He spoke very respectfully of Madgie, and always called her "Miss Carr."

"Miss Carr is a fine figure of a young woman," he said. "She will go far. She will be president some day, whether you ladies get the vote or not."

Father understood almost everything, but she could not ask him about this problem of hers; no man would understand it. It was a woman's problem, of the kind that every woman must face and settle alone.

Sally Belle sighed and stared wistfully across the street. The afternoon light came and went on the lawn in the pretty way that it always did. It touched the open lawn, making the faded grass look bright, and then slanted quickly away and hid under the one big tree at the corner. It was a beautiful tree. Half the leaves had fallen now, and you could

see the wide free sweep of the branches, and the leaves that clung were a cool, clear, greeny gold. Sally Belle liked this tree. She always liked to look at it. She looked at it now for a minute, and while she looked she had a queer solemn feeling. She knew what to do. She had decided all in a minute as they walked up the street. Had she decided right? Anyway, she had decided. It was done. She took Madgie's arm and squeezed it hard and they started on up the street again. The last of the crowd was hurrying into Lillian's front yard, and she could hear the piano, though she could not make out the tune. They were in the back parlor singing. It was good to be going there too. It was good to belong to a crowd and do what the crowd did. It was good to be grown up.

"Pearl," she said, "I'll do it."

"Next week at camp?"

"Yes."

"Promise?"

"I'll shake."

Their hands met and clasped in their new secret grip, with which important vows were sealed, thumb pressed to thumb, ring fingers intertwined.

"Cross my heart till death do us part," said Sally Belle, reciting an ancient formula invented freshman year but respected still. "I'll go with Gus. Pig and I will break up."

IX

BEING COLD

"Come on, Baby. Come on, Bess."

Pig and Sally Belle were taking their last ride together. Pig did not know it. He talked in a low singsong voice to his old white horse, Queen Bess, as he always talked when he was very angry or very comfortable. He was comfortable now. He sat slouched over the reins, with his hat off and his black head bare. The noon sun beat down on the open parts of the road, but he only squinted and grinned. Pig liked the sun. The white birches along the wood road were almost bare, and dry autumn leaves fell on the buggy top in little scattering showers; but the evergreens were black green and made deep patches of black-velvet shadow, and the woods far in were a rusty sunlit gold as they passed. It was almost high noon. They were halfway to camp already, and Sally Belle had not begun to be cold to Pig yet.

She did not know how to begin. This was the day when she was to break up with Pig, but she had made no plans for it—just waited for it to come. She had felt it coming, like examination day, and waked up in the night and remembered it. All that week she had not quarreled with Pig. He had given her two green tablets out of his father's store, and she was writing her novel on them. It was a novel of the Latin Quarter in Paris. She was the heroine, eighteen, and studying music there, and Free Foster was the hero. The first chapter was almost done. She had to break up, but she had a whole day to do it—a day at camp.

Days at camp were wonderful. They were so long that anything might happen, and many things did. Hearts broke and were mended again. There were little private camps all along the lake for hunting and fishing—Camp Sewall and Camp Smith—but this camp had no name at all. It was just The Camp—the big public camp, where the Village Improvement Society kept a cook and boats, and ice boats in winter; where the crowd's finest parties were given. To-day they had two freezers of ice-

cream and Free Foster for chaperon and Free's violin for dancing, and the whole crowd was here; six couples in buggies and eight in the hayrack just ahead, though the winding road hid it. If it were not for the duty that Sally Belle had to perform, this would be a perfect day. She looked at Pig, and he caught her eye and grinned.

"Great day for the race," he said. "What race? The human race."

This was an old joke, and it was not very funny, but Pig liked it.

"Cat got your tongue?" he asked.

"No, not a cat," said Sally Belle carefully. "Pig——"

"Sir!"

"Pig, I want to talk to you."

" 'My Lord, your word is my will and my sword is at your service,' " said Pig politely. It was one of his two lines in the sophomore play, now in rehearsal. " 'One hour to sunrise,' " he added. It was his other line.

"Pig, maybe you think——"

"Never!"

Sally Belle sighed. Pig was going to be funny. He did that sometimes, but if you took no notice of it and talked straight on he stopped after a while.

"Maybe you think I've acted quiet, driving out here to-day—I've acted queer all the week. Well, Pig, there's a reason why—why——"

" 'Why do they call me a Gibson girl?' " interrupted Pig with deep feeling.

"There's a reason why I act the way I act," explained Sally Belle patiently. "You and I have been going together——"

"Don't boast of it."

"Don't be silly," said Sally Belle impatiently.

"Maybe I'm not the one that's silly," said Pig in a low voice.

He took the stubby whip, flicked a fly that Sally Belle could not see from Queen Bess' collar and put the whip carefully back in the socket; then turned in his seat and looked at Sally Belle.

" 'Strike here!' " he said. It was not his line in the play; it was the hero's, and Pig smote his red sweater with the hero's noble gesture. " 'This heart beats for you!' "

Pig looked straight into Sally Belle's eyes and

waited. His eyes looked just the brown that the pine needles were, deep in the woods. She had never noticed that before. He was not grinning now. He was not smiling at all. His chin wiggled the way it used to sometimes when he was a very little boy. Sally Belle could not go on for a minute with what she had meant to say. She could not go on at all. She did not know why. Her cheeks felt hot.

"That's not your heart. It's your diaphragm," she said crossly. "Pig——"

"Waiting."

"I've got something to tell you. Not now, but later—later, sometime to-day."

"All right for you. Come on, Baby."

"You needn't act so pleased with yourself," said Sally Belle sulkily. "There's nothing to be pleased about."

Pig was waving the stubby whip in curves and flourishes, like rapier play as the sophomore dramatic club understood it, stabbing at passing trees and at Queen Bess, who, though used to this and other extravagances, flapped her left ear and glanced over her shoulder.

" 'Die, traitor!' " said Pig. It was the last line of the play. " 'Thank heaven, that I have lived to win the subject of my masterpiece!' " He made the grand salute with the whip, looped the reins over the hook in the buggy pole, put his feet on the dasher and leaned back, squinting contentedly at the sky.

" 'I can't keep still no longer. I got to sing,' " he announced from the latest coon song.

"If you've got to sing, then sing," said Sally Belle.

"Thanking you for the cordial invitation," said Pig, and in a high plaintive voice, which was only slightly off key, he sang:

"My Ann Eliza
She's a surpriser,
She is my ragtime girl."

Queen Bess, who had learned to hear music calmly, whinnied once, and then plodded stolidly on up the Brook Road, which she knew much better than Pig. Sally Belle cuddled down beside him into the soft place in the cushion where the springs were weak, and leaned back her head and looked up at the moving strip of blue sky between the buggy top and the high dark trees. She liked this song.

Pig's voice sounded sweet outdoors. There was something about it that went with outdoors. It made you want to cry, and it made you feel all warm inside, and happy. While he sang you thought of other things, beautiful things—the next chapter of her Paris novel was beginning now in her head—or you did not think at all. That was best. The hay-rack was far ahead, and you could not see it or hear it. The end of the Brook Road was near. The trees were thin. You could see blue water through them, but you did not need to look. You could shut your eyes and be all alone in the woods, with Pig singing. This was their last ride, but it felt like all their other rides.

"Lost your voice?" Pig asked. He had sung *Ann Eliza* twice, straight through, and was starting the chorus again, conducting an imaginary orchestra with his whip.

"I—I don't feel like singing."

"No?"

Pig did not ask why. He stopped singing and took down the reins and turned out of the Brook Road into the narrow cart track that led to camp. He drove through it and pulled up Queen Bess.

The cart track and the woods ended here together. At the left, half hidden by trees, was the stable; and ahead, with a steep path winding down to it, the camp, wide and low, with a fringe of trees in front, and then the lake. It looked very blue to-day, more blue than the sky—the bluest blue in the world. Sally Belle jumped down, holding Pig's hand.

"Thank you for a very pleasant ride," she said formally.

"See you later," said Pig, and drove off to the stable.

The ride was over. She had been cold to Pig. Pig did not know it, but that was not her fault. She had done it. It was hard to do, but perhaps the rest of breaking up would not be so hard. She started down the path to camp. It was slippery with pine needles. They made your feet dance when you walked, and a wind from the lake made all the trees dance too. The white birches were very white against the blue of the lake. The boats at the slip bobbed up and down in the water, the wood paths along the lake were gold fairy paths in the sun, and blue-white smoke came from both the camp chimneys. She slid down the path to the end

and ran up the steps to the broad piazza of the camp and stood there dancing the pine needles off her feet and taking deep breaths of the air from the lake. It was fun to be there. It always was. It was fun, even if you had to break up. She pulled open the big unpainted door and slipped inside.

X

BREAKING UP

The big bare room looked just as it always did: the giant fireplace, where a log fire was snapping; the stone chimney, the shelf above, so broad that Sally Belle and Pig always climbed up there and played cards; the rough armchairs and unpainted tables; the wide, many-paned windows with red curtains pushed back so that you saw the lake and the trees. This room and the tiny kitchen and the long dining-room beyond, with the gallery above, and the bunks for hunting parties, were all there was to camp.

The crowd was all here and at home already. One boat was out on the lake. Free was in it. Sally Belle saw his blue sweater. Games of whist or Pitch Jack were started at all the tables and in front of the fire both corn poppers were going. Tish and Lil held one and Madgie the other. She dropped it and hurried to Sally Belle.

"Hello, darling. How did you get home last night?" she said.

It was a standard greeting. You never answered the question. She helped Sally Belle out of her wraps and pulled her down on the nearest window-sill with an arm round her waist.

"Darling," she said in a thrilling whisper, "Gus and I have got it all fixed up."

"What?" said Sally Belle faintly.

"Gus is so pleased. He could hardly wait for you to get here. Look at him."

Sally Belle looked. Gus was reading a paper-covered Nick Carter book in a corner by the fire. His head was bent over it and his chair was tilted back. His impatience did not appear, but his yellow hair looked very yellow and his red tie looked very red.

"He's handsome," said Sally Belle.

"He put on that red tie just to please you," said Madgie impressively. "Now, darling, you never broke up with a boy before, and you're scared to. Is that right? And Pig can't see through a ladder with a hole in it. Is that right too?"

"I gave him a hint and he didn't take it," Sally Belle admitted.

"Well, don't give him any more hints. Just start going with Gus. Start now."

"Before dinner?" said Sally Belle.

"Now."

"I—I don't know how."

"I'll show you. Unless," said Madgie sarcastically, "you'd rather run this yourself."

"Oh, I couldn't," said Sally Belle—"no. But, Pearl"—a question had been troubling Sally Belle for a week. She tried to ask it now—"if a boy wants to go with a girl, why can't he go right to the girl and say so? Why does it have to be all fixed up for him like this?"

"It's the right way to do it. All the boys do it that way."

"Oh!"

"Ready?" Sally Belle nodded. "Gus," Madgie called, "there's a little girl over here that wants a game of cards."

"Pearl, I can't. I don't want to. I can't," whispered Sally Belle, but Madgie's arm held her tight.

Gus put his book in his pocket and came slowly

toward them. He stood looking down at them and smiling. His face was red from the fire—as red as his tie—and his teeth were very big and white. He was very tall. He seemed to grow taller as he stood there.

"That right?" he said. "Want to play cards, Miss Smith?"

"Yes," said Sally Belle firmly.

"Who with?"

"Guess," said Madgie, giggling. "Somebody not ten miles from here. Somebody in a red necktie."

"You," said Sally Belle.

"I don't care if I do," said Gus elegantly.

"I'll play with you till you get started, if you want," said Madgie graciously.

"No, I thank you," said Sally Belle formally. "Mr. Carr, you come here." She crossed the room to the fireplace, pushed a chair close to it, climbed up and sat cross-legged on the shelf at the end. Gus looked up at her doubtfully. "It's big enough. And," she added with dignity, "it's where I play."

"What you say goes," said Gus gallantly. "What a girl says goes with me, though it isn't every girl I'd say that to," he added pointedly. "Know that?"

He put his hands on the shelf and swung himself up and sat facing her. "Pretty snug up here."

"Yes." Sally Belle pulled out Pig's pack of cards that he kept hidden behind the chimney, shuffled them, let Gus cut them and dealt them. Gus looked at her over the top of his cards, but she looked at her own hand and did not meet his eyes.

"Pitch?" he said. "Right you are. Glad you're here, Miss Smith?"

"I asked you to come. You don't have to call me Miss Smith. It's your turn to play," said Sally Belle.

"You're a funny kid."

Gus laughed, but his laugh sounded pleased. They began to play. He did not lose his temper, as Pig always did at cards. He played carelessly and fast, but he always seemed to guess right. He beat her in three hands, and they started another game. Gus dangled his legs over the edge of the shelf as he sat. They were very long legs. He was very tall and strong and handsome, the handsomest boy in the crowd, and by this time the crowd all knew that he belonged to her. One by one they looked up at the card game on the shelf, and looked

politely away and talked to one another about it. Madgie kept smiling a self-conscious smile and did not look up at all.

"Where's Plummer?" Gus asked. He was giving a fancy shuffle to Pig's cards.

"Unharnessing. Want him?"

"I don't if you don't."

"I don't want him," said Sally Belle firmly.

She did want him. She wished he would come and see her up there with Gus. What would Pig do when he saw her? Sometimes boys fought when they were angry. Sometimes when Pig was very angry he cried. She did not want the crowd to see Pig cry. Nobody came down the path from the stables. She watched it. Where was he?

"I know a little girl that's going for a walk with me after dinner," Gus said—"a long walk."

"What's her name?"

"Same as yours."

"Don't be too sure," said Sally Belle coyly but absently.

Where was Pig? Every one else was here. Free had come in from the lake. The door into the kitchen was shut and locked. Boys shook it at inter-

vals, and old Charlie, the cook, scolded at them from inside, and mysterious and pleasant smells came from there. Dinner was almost ready. Was something wrong with Queen Bess or Pig? Sally Belle threw down her cards.

"Don't let's play any more," she said.

"What you say goes. From now on it goes with me."

Gus jumped down and held out his hand. Sally Belle did not take it. She sat still where she was and stared. The door of Charlie's little kitchen had opened and a strange figure stood framed in it. It was not Charlie. Sally Belle saw it first, then the crowd saw, too, and called out appropriate greetings.

" 'Kiss me, honey, do.' "

" 'Darktown is out to-night.' "

Bowing and smiling, and looking surprised by the attention she received, but gratified, a fat colored lady stood in the doorway. She was gaily but tastefully dressed in a pink-and-white waist, a Turkey-red skirt and a blue-checked apron tied so tight that her waist was small, though her matronly figure was not. A red turban wreathed her head, gold earrings

hung from her ears, her hands were white; but her face was as black as burnt cork could make it. Her eyes were hidden behind a big pair of smoked-glass spectacles, but they were brown—the brown of pine needles deep in the woods. The lady's waist was her own, but her figure was a pillow, her apron and glasses were Charlie's, her skirt was a curtain, her earrings were curtain rings, her turban was Sally Belle's scarf—and the lady was Pig; Pig, smiling and winking and flirting outrageously with his eyes at everybody in the room except Sally Belle. He did not seem to see her at all. She slipped down from the shelf and stood by Gus.

"That's Plummer," Gus explained. "He's a case. I didn't think he had it in him."

"He hasn't," said Sally Belle crossly.

Pig waved a coy hand to command silence, did not get it, but raised his voice in correct coon-song dialect:

"Ladies and gentlemen, friends and fellow citizens, dinner am served. My pal Charlie, he sent me out here with that li'l' announcement to make.

"Oh, how them boarders yell
When they hear the dinner bell!"

He sang in a cracked soprano. "Lost my voice, and I got to keep on singing till I find it," he explained plaintively. "Lost my sweetheart too.

"My gal has left me,
My gal has shook me,
Will some one tell me where she's gone?

"But everybody smiles on me while comin' through the rye. I got a place to eat, I got a place to sleep, I got a-plenty good clothes to wear, I got a hat on my head, I got shoes on my feet, so what more need I care. Choose partners and form in line for the cakewalk. What li'l' boy or girl wants to escort this nigger in? Don't all speak at once."

They did, of course, crowding round Pig and fighting for him. Pig's red turban bobbed up and down in the middle of a crowd of boys—all the boys in the room but Gus. Free Foster put down a book that he was reading, and came and watched and laughed. It was hard to make Free laugh.

"Oh, you chaperon!" called Pig, and pushed all his admirers away and plunged toward Free, dragging torn and trailing draperies, and caught Free's arm. "'I got a sneaky feelin' for you,'" he an-

nounced tenderly, and started for the dining-room, doing an elaborate cakewalk with Free.

A hastily formed procession followed him into the dining-room and round and round the long tables, cakewalking two by two. Sally Belle would not dance, but Gus tried to. Almost everybody danced, and everybody sang. The tune they sang was a strange blend of all the best cakewalk tunes. Pig's voice led all the rest. It was off key and hoarse and loud, but it made you want to sing with him. He called out words that the others forgot. He made up new words and sang them over and over till the others sang them too. They were not very funny words, but everybody laughed.

"Crowd's broke loose and old Free can't do a thing.
Tissue Doyle's going to buy a wedding ring.
Madge has shook Stub—she's as happy as a king.
There'll be a hot time—in this camp—to-night."

"All over but the cheering," Pig announced at last, and at once it was. There was a scramble for chairs and the crowd dropped into them breathless. "Hey, look who's here. Me old friend of college days. Comrades, comrades, ever since we were

boys. Silence in the court room! The judge is going to speak."

Charlie stood in the door with a steaming tureen of chowder. He made a slow round of the table and served it, and dinner began.

"Any guy that can start a rough-house before dinner," said Gus—"why, you've got to hand it to him. But Plummer will laugh on the other side of his mouth when he gets wise to a certain little something. Hey, little girl?" He looked at Sally Belle tenderly.

"Yes," said Sally Belle. "Mr. Carr—Augustus—will you pass the pickles, please?"

Sally Belle and Gus were at the lower end of the table. The table was made of three narrow board tables put together, with red cloths overlapping. Facing them, enthroned in state alone at the other end sat Pig. He had Free on his right hand and Tish on his left, and divided his favors equally between them. Tish buttered biscuits and fed him, but he rested his head on Free's shoulder at intervals, and Free let him. He threw kisses impartially at any one disposed to catch them. The pillow inside his waist

had slipped and he was no longer a perfect forty-six, though still an ample one. His turban was over one ear and his black hair showed, curling very tight; somebody had pinned a faded rose in it. Sally Belle tried to get his eye and could not. She stared at him. Pig was not a case. He would join a rough-house but never start one; he was too lazy. What had changed him? Was this Pig?

"This is some swell feed," said Gus.

It was. The chowder was a camp chowder with onions and bits of pork and no milk. Charlie kept the coffee cups filled, and brought hot biscuits and fried a second batch of doughnuts, and a third. The crowd did not eat quite so much anywhere as at camp. They never did two things at once. They were eating now, and the rough-house had stopped while they ate, but it would break out again. There were signs of it all around the table. Girls whispered and giggled, boys flirted with Pig and snatches of song were started. The crowd had got going, and for the day the crowd was Pig's and only Pig's. They laughed at everything he said and did and watched him when he did nothing. When he slipped

out of Tissue's embrace and disappeared in the kitchen they applauded on general principles, and waited.

The chowder tureen had been filled and emptied three times. The table was cleared. Pig came back holding above his head the biggest platter in camp piled high with ice-cream. Charlie followed him with plates of cake, put them on the table, grinned benevolently and vanished for the day.

"Go away back and sit down. They don't need you. Not so long as they got this coon," Pig said, and began to dance round the table, serving and singing and adding appropriate remarks to each helping.

"Sweets to the sweet," he said, serving Free first with a languishing air. "Lillian honey, you don't need any; you're too cold to me now. This li'l' pumpkin-colored coon, she's so warm it can't hurt her." This was Madgie. He gave Gus an extra-sized helping, but did not speak to him.

"Pig, you are acting foolish," whispered Sally Belle. "I wish you'd stop it. I want to talk sense to you, Pig."

"Ann Eliza—Miss Ann Eliza Green," Pig cor-

rected her. "That's my name, honey. I'll talk sense when you talk sense," he added in a low voice, "and not before."

She had caught at his crimson skirt. He pulled away and it tore in her hand. He raised the platter with a flourishing gesture high above Sally Belle and Gus.

"The happy couple," he announced cheerfully. "They are on their honeymoon, but have had no chance to spoon." Then he went on round the table, whistling the wedding march.

Sally Belle did not watch him any more. She sat still for a while, watching the ice-cream melt on her plate; then she began to eat it very fast. She scraped the plate clean, chose a large piece of chocolate cake deliberately and put it in her pocket. Then she pushed back her chair and rose.

"If you want to walk with me we'll walk now," she said.

"What you say goes," said Gus dutifully with his mouth full of cake.

He finished it in two large bites, got up and followed her out of the room. Nobody saw them go. Nobody cared whether they went or not. The rough-

house had begun again already. Pig stood on a chair announcing his engagement to Tish in a long speech, broken by clapping and stamping, and knives and forks beating on the table for applause. After dinner the crowd always paired off at once and walked or rowed on the lake; but to-day nobody else had left the dining-room yet. Sally Belle and Gus went out of the front door and down the path to the lake.

Dinner was the event of the day at camp. It was always late, but Pig had made it later than usual, and longer. The short September afternoon was half over and already the lake did not look quite so blue or the sun quite so bright. The boats were all at the slip and empty, and the lake and the shore and the world looked empty too. Behind them they had heard faint but unmistakable sounds—an impromptu orchestra beginning to play on dish pans and combs. Pig was probably leading it. Gus laughed.

"Queer," he said, "how a clown like Plummer ever hit it off with a quiet girl like you."

"We'll walk round the beach and back by the woods," said Sally Belle. "I know a path. We can get back by six. We'll skip stones now. I know

where there are some. I'll race you round that point."

"What do I get if I get there first?" Gus asked. It was a silly question.

"You win the race," said Sally Belle coldly.

Gus did win it, but she was close behind. They stopped side by side, flushed and out of breath, on a narrow crescent of beach. She and Pig always skipped stones here. No matter how many you threw, there were just as many left; thin gray stones, warm in the sun, curled up at the edges like the petals of flowers. She picked up a stone and warmed it in her hand and patted it. Pig's orchestra was playing louder. You could hear it plainly out here. You could be almost sure it was playing *Ann Eliza.* She held her head high and listened.

"Think Plummer saw us go?" said Gus. "Think he's on to us yet?"

"I don't know," said Sally Belle. Her voice was not quite steady. "And I don't care," she added firmly. "Come along. Let's walk. Let's walk fast. I don't want to skip stones to-day."

"Call this walking?" said Gus.

"It is walking," said Sally Belle.

She led the way round the gray strip of beach. She stepped daintily on the smooth unsteady stones. It was fun, like dancing, and the lake water made a little tune that your feet could keep time to. Thick woods crowded close on one side, and on the other side the blue water came close and rippled and lapped and tried to come closer still. You could pretend that you were walking on water, it came so close. Sometimes there was no beach at all, only great piled-up rocks that you climbed across; but when you jumped down on the other side the beach was there again, waiting. The beach was narrow, but it was very long. It led you on and on. It unwound before you as if it had no end. It was different round every curve, always new but never strange. It was as long as the world.

Gus was not used to walking on the rocks. He was getting very tired. He had tried to talk at first, but after a while he did not talk at all—he just scrambled and panted behind her.

"All right, Augustus?" she asked at last.

They were on a level stretch of beach where you could stop and get your breath. Gus sat down on a rock and mopped his forehead.

"I'm still alive," he said, "and kicking. But that was some sprint and you are some sprinter! Say, why don't you call me Gus?"

"I don't like the name of Gus."

"Why?"

"I just don't—that's all," said Sally Belle. "Look, here's where the path begins."

Between two trees, hard to see if you did not know it, a tiny gold ribbon of path led into the woods. It led deep in and round to the camp again. It was a private path. She had found it last spring with Pig. They worked at it together and kept it clear. They made a part of it themselves, cleaning out dead wood and cutting trail marks on the trees. Nobody else had been through it with them, nobody knew it was there. It was a secret path, her path and Pig's.

She parted the branches and plunged in and Gus followed her.

"Path?" he said. "Cow track!"

"It gets wider after a while," Sally Belle said stiffly, "and you don't have to come if you don't want to."

"Don't you want me?"

"Yes," said Sally Belle. "But don't keep asking me things like that."

"Like what?" A twig had caught in her hair. He pulled it out. "I can do that, can't I?"

"Come along," said Sally Belle.

She started along the path, walking first and as fast as she could. You could not go very fast, the path twisted and turned so much. You could not always stand up very straight. Often you could not see the path except for a few steps before you. You heard lake water at first, but soon you could not hear it or see it at all. You saw nothing but trees and trees. The wind in the trees made a little noise like talking. You could almost make out the words, but not quite. They were beautiful words.

Gus was not fat like Pig, but he made more noise in the woods. He tramped along behind her, breathing hard and stumbling over roots of trees. He stopped to pull twigs off his clothes. She would have to bring him here every time she came. She could never come here with Pig again.

"Hey, what's your hurry?" Gus said. "Where's the fire? Who said this path got wider?"

"I did," said Sally Belle, "and it does. Right here. Don't—don't you like it?"

They had stepped out of the trees into a little open space roofed by tall pines but clear of undergrowth and green with moss. A flat rock made a table, and Pig always brought candy and peanuts to eat here. Last spring it was here that they found their first Mayflowers. Gus stopped and looked round him. Sally Belle looked at Gus. His face looked damp and hot and his teeth looked too big for his face, like the wolf's in the picture—"the better to eat you."

"Put a table in here and a couple of benches and it wouldn't be half bad. But I don't like the woods," he said. "Never have. Nothing doing there. And I don't think much of your path."

"You don't have to. It's not your path."

"I don't like your path, but I like you," said Gus. "When Madge told me you wanted to go with me I didn't quite get the idea—you looked like a kid. But Madge had her eye on Plummer, so I looked you over, and—well, you look good to me. You suit me right down to the ground. We can have swell times."

"Wait," said Sally Belle, "please." She stopped. Her cheeks felt hot, and she wanted them to grow cool, but they only kept getting hotter, so she went on in a faint voice: "Please say that again. I want to get it straight. Madgie told you I wanted to go with you?"

"Sure!"

"And Madgie wants—wants ——"

"Plummer? Sure? He's a kid, but she could train him. She's sick of Stub. Great girl, Madgie."

"What will Stub do?"

"That's his lookout. Everybody else is pleased."

"Oh!" said Sally Belle. "Oh!"

"I'm pleased and you're pleased."

"It wouldn't matter whether I was pleased or not," said Sally Belle slowly. "I've promised. I'd have to go on if—if I hated you."

"Well, you don't hate me." Gus smiled and his big teeth showed. "You like me. You like me a lot. Say so, can't you? We're going together."

"No, we're not," said Sally Bell—"not yet. Not till I talk to Pig."

She turned away from him into the path again,

where the twisted yellow birch marked it. He laughed and followed her.

The clearing was near the camp, and the path to camp ran quite straight from here. It was growing darker fast. The gold was gone from the trees. Black shadows came and went; then they came and stayed. You walked straight through them. They grew wider. It was late. It was almost time to start home, but first, at camp, you always teased Charlie for cookies if you were hungry, and you danced the Virginia reel. That was all you could dance on the rough boards of the floor. The fire blazed high while you danced it, and the horses waited and stamped outside.

Sally Belle would have to drive home with Gus, but she would not dance with Gus. She would not dance at all. She would talk to Pig. She would break up. She had promised. Perhaps she would never speak to Madgie again, but she would break up. Her heart ached, but it had ached all day. It did not ache much worse now. It would feel better if she could talk to Pig; if Pig would be nice to her and stop acting in the silly way that he had

acted all day. She wanted to talk to him now. She could not wait any longer. She wanted Pig.

"Race for life upon the ice!" panted Gus behind her.

She did not answer or look back at him. She slid along the pine needles, almost running. She came to the last long slope of path. She ran. She ran quite fast. Her tam came off and she waved it in her hand. Her braids were unpinned and she fixed them as she ran. She came to the pine at the end of the path and stopped. She stepped out from behind the pine and stood still and looked around her. Gus looked, too, over her shoulder. He whistled.

"Left us cold," he said.

It was true. The path ended close to where the wood road began. From here you looked straight down through a gap in the trees at the lake and the camp. It was dark in the woods; it was twilight here and it would soon be dark. The lamps were lighted and the dying fire glowed red and grew fainter while you watched. The curtains were not drawn, and through the unshaded windows you saw the whole big bare room. There was nobody in it; nobody on the broad piazzas or the gray paths by

the lake. Only, far down on the shore, one dark little figure moved—Charlie covering the boats for the night. In front of the stable, the space where the hayrack had stood was empty, and only one buggy stood there. The crowd had gone.

"What do you know about that?" said Gus.

"Nothing," said Sally Belle.

She winked her eyes to keep back the tears. Free often started first if the buggies were late in starting. The hayrack had to go slow and they could catch up and pass it. But she did not explain this to Gus. She did not want to talk to Gus. She did not want to talk at all. The crowd had gone and Queen Bess had gone and Pig had gone. Pig had gone without her—Pig. Pig never left her. He always took care of her. He always had. If he had left her like this it meant just one thing. She had done what she promised. She and Pig had broken up. She was going with Gus. She stared at him wide-eyed through the twilight. Her heart did not ache any more. It was a cold dead lump inside her.

"We've done it now!" she said.

Gus had no idea that a crisis had come and passed. He just stood there smiling his big-toothed smile.

"I'll take care of you," he boasted. "You don't have to worry. I'll get you home first and beat them all to it. I've got uncle's roan race-horse that won the free-for-all race at the fair. Got the Boston buggy too. I like a swell turnout and I like a fast horse, and I can handle one. You won't ever have to ride again with that cheap old skate, Queen Bess."

"No," said Sally Belle absently.

She was thinking and thinking fast. After a minute she looked up at Gus with her sweetest smile. She made her voice as sweet as she could make it.

"Augustus, go get your horse. While you're harnessing I'll walk along the road a piece and you can pick me up," she said.

"All right."

"I may walk quite a long way. If you don't catch up with me at first, you just drive right on and keep looking."

"What you say goes."

It was the fourth time he had said that to-day. She had counted them. He walked off toward the stable. He swaggered and swung his arms, but his

shoulders looked big and strong and his blond hair showed pale gold in the twilight. He was handsome. He was a very handsome boy.

"All right for you," Sally Belle said out loud. "All right for you, Mr. Carr."

Then she stepped back into the little path that was hers and Pig's. Gus would harness quickly. He did everything fast and well. When he grew up he would be rich, a millionaire perhaps, and his wife would wear diamonds, and curly feathers in her hats. The pine at the end of the path was not big, but it hid you from the road if you sat in just the right place. Sally Belle found the place and sat in it and folded her skirts neatly about her. Now she was ready for Gus.

Gus came soon. She heard the roan's hoof beats pat the road with neat, hard little pats. The Boston buggy was new and well oiled and you could not hear it at all. He passed close in front of her tree. She peeped out and saw him. He drove in good form and sat straight and held the reins with two fingers. He slowed up. Her heart stopped beating. But he had not seen her. He made the turn up the

hill. The roan took the hill smoothly. The buggy glided silently away. Gus and his swell turnout were gone.

Sally Belle gave one long sigh of delight and relief. Then she pulled off her tam and folded it under her head for a pillow and curled up into a little heap at the foot of the tree. She could not stay there long. It was getting too dark and too cold. She did not know just what to do next. She could telephone her father, stay all night at camp, try to walk home. But one thing was clear in her mind. She would not drive home with Gus. She laughed out loud. It was the first time she had laughed hard that day. After a while the lump in her heart was quite gone. She was happy.

She got up at last and came round in front of the tree and stood there doing a little dance to warm her feet. It was not twilight now, it was really dark; soft September dark that came so early and fast. There were no stars, but the stars would come soon; one came now, while she looked—a tiny one, high above the camp. All the lights in camp were out except Charlie's lamp in the kitchen. She turned away from the camp and looked up the wood road.

If you looked hard you could make it out in the dark, winding through the white birches. She did not know what would happen next, but by this time she did not care very much. She felt rested and happy and safe for no reason at all. She kept her eyes on the road.

Presently, just at the turn of the road, she saw something; she saw two lights. They came suddenly, like stars, but they did not look like stars; they were too dim, they hung too low, and they were moving toward her, moving quite fast. They were carriage lights. She knew whose lights they were. She clasped her hands over her heart and pressed them tight against it. The lights came close. She could hear the old buggy rattling—the shabbiest buggy in town. She could see that the horse was white. She could hear a faintly whistled tune. It was a gay little tune, but it sounded sad, whistled so plaintively. It was *Ann Eliza.*

Sally Belle ran out into the middle of the road and stood there. She held her arms high above her head and waved them. The buggy drove up and stopped. The whistling stopped, too, in the middle of a bar.

"Hello, Queen Bess!" she called. "Hello, Pig!"

"Want to get run over?" said a gruff voice from the buggy.

"No," said Sally Belle. "I want to ride with you."

She stepped to the side of the buggy. It turned out for her, creaking. A hand reached out and gripped her elbow hard. It was Pig's hand. She groped for the step with her foot and found it and climbed in. Pig folded the robes close around her and wrapped a sweater round her shoulders. It was Pig's old gray sweater. She pulled it round her tight.

"Pig, I'm sorry," she whispered. "I'm sorry."

"That's all right," said Pig in a queer little whisper, not like his voice at all. "It's all right."

"Come on, Baby," he said then in a very loud voice. "Come on, Bess."

Queen Bess whinnied once, swung the buggy round and plunged up the hill to the top. She struck into the wood road. Sally Belle looked back once at the camp. She could not see it. Charlie's light was out. It was very dark down there on the shore of the lake. It looked as if no camp had ever

been there. And the wood road was dark ahead—black dark; but Queen Bess knew the way. She went carefully over the jolts in the road. She was taking care of Sally Belle and Pig. Sally Belle found the soft place in the cushion and nestled into it, closing her eyes.

"It's a pretty night," Pig said softly after a long time.

"Yes," said Sally Belle. "Pig, what made you come back?"

"I had to. Left something at camp and I had to come back for it."

"Oh!"

"I cut through and drove round by the Mill Road."

"Pig, what made you act that way and dress up that way—and—not talk to me?"

"I couldn't let you can me before the whole crowd, could I?"

"No. Pig, where's Madgie?"

"I don't know. In the hayrack—under it for all of me. Madgie Carr's a has-been. She won't run the crowd much longer. Can't run me."

"Me either," said Sally Belle firmly. "Pig ——"

"Waiting."

"Sometimes I'm not very nice. I get silly ideas. I'm not nice to you."

"I'm not kicking."

"Gus Carr's handsome."

"Big stiff," said Pig calmly.

"Yes," said Sally Belle, "he is. And who'd ride with a race-horse if they could ride with Queen Bess? And, Pig——" She choked, but went on quite bravely. "Pig, how could I go with another boy when I'm going with you?"

Pig did not answer. They turned out of the Brook Road into the main road and Queen Bess whinnied and struck into her longest lope. She smelled home. Along this road little lights showed in farm-house windows, and now all the stars were out, more stars than Sally Belle had ever seen—new ones perhaps. Sometimes there were new stars. She leaned her head far back and looked at them.

"You can sing," she said after a while, "if you want to."

"I don't," said Pig very gruffly. "I—I don't feel any too good."

"Why, Pig?"

"You know."

"Why?"

"I've had kind of a bad day."

"You have?"

"I have. Come on, Baby. It's all right for those that like it, but it's not quite all it's cracked up to be—breaking up."

XI

THE NEW LAW

Two girls came down the front steps of the Sewall house. They ran across the lawn and started down the street. Sally Belle sat under the tree at the corner of her lawn and watched them.

Supper was just over, June dark came late and this was the last night of June. It was twilight still. Under the low-swinging branches of the maples across the street you could see the two girls quite clearly. They were both in white. The tall girl wore soft, straight-falling white, and her hair was brushed back from her face in smooth, bright waves. It was golden hair—yellow gold. The short girl wore ruffles, fussy little fluttering ruffles that would not keep still, and her brown curls fussed and fluttered, too, when she moved her little head. She was Madgie Carr, uncrowned queen of Sally Belle's crowd, and the tall girl was Lillian Sewall, Sally

Belle's own best friend. They walked slowly, arm in arm. They walked very close together. Their heads were close. They whispered and talked, and she knew what they talked about. She knew.

They were opposite her house now. They did not look up. Madgie whispered something into Lillian's ear. They laughed. A lump came into Sally Belle's throat. She swallowed it, and drew a long breath and called to them.

"Hello!" she called. "Hello there!" They heard her and stopped and looked at her across the street. They kept their arms round each other's waists as they stood. "Come on over."

"Can't."

"What's your hurry?" Sally Belle tried to make her voice sound as if she did not care very much. "Got a date?"

"Nothing like that," Madgie giggled. "We're just walking."

"Where to?"

"Post-office. You can come if you want to."

"Thanks," said Sally Belle with dignity. "I don't care to stick myself in."

"Don't be silly."

"I'm not. I have to wait here for Pig."

"Pig!" Madgie shrugged her shoulders. She could shrug them just like the French maid in the last ten-twenty-thirty show at the hall. She could raise her eyebrows too. She was raising them now. "Oh, Pig!"

"Yes, Pig—Harold Plummer," Sally Belle explained sarcastically, "if you don't know who I mean. When Pig tells me to wait I wait. If I didn't there'd be trouble. Pig won't stand any nonsense. Pig ——"

"Some cave man!" said Madgie politely, too politely. "So long. See you later, at Doyle's. Come on, darling."

She took Lillian's arm and leaned on it, and they went on down the street, not once looking back. Lillian had not spoken once, and before supper she had refused to walk to the post-office with Sally Belle.

"All right for you," said Sally Belle calmly, out loud. She spread her cape on the grass, tucked her starched skirts under her and lay down with her arms clasped under her head and looked up at the tree above her. The girls did not want her. The girls did not ever want her any more. And

it was not just these girls who did not want her, it was all the girls, and the boys, too—all her world, her crowd. To-night she was going to Tissue Doyle's piazza party and to-morrow she was going for a week to Camp Carr with the other girls, but she was not wanted there or anywhere. And at last she knew why.

Sally Belle was fifteen. For three years she had belonged to the crowd. She was the youngest girl in it—the twelve-year-old kid till she lived that nickname down. It was hard to get into a crowd, but Sally Belle had soon learned that it was harder to stay in. There were always so many laws that you had to keep. If you did not keep them you were odd, a freak, and the crowd soured on you. They were unwritten laws; nobody told them to you; you had to find them out for yourself, and they changed all the time. You had to wear what the other girls wore and say the slang words they said. You had to wear short winter coats, and not long ones; gored skirts and not gathered; pin your hair with a barrette and not tie it with a ribbon. The boy you were going with had to stay till the clock struck ten when he called on you and bring you

Belle Isle candy and no other kind. There were laws and laws. Sally Belle kept them all. Sometimes they were hard to keep, but she kept them. She stayed in with the crowd, and in junior year social triumphs came. She had a poem in the High School *Oracle,* a part in the junior play—the part of the heroine's grandmother. She was secretary and treasurer of the Happy Thought Club. She had all her extras engaged at dances.

She was not a beauty like Lillian, or a queen like Madgie; but she had her place in the crowd. She had conquered her world. She conquered it and lost it. It was in the spring of the junior year that trouble began.

It began slowly, with whispers, curious looks, gossip she overheard, secrets kept from her. Everywhere there were signs that there was some new law of the crowd which she had not kept. They were little signs. Sally Belle felt lazy and safe. She was writing an epic poem, too. But in May the poem was done and locked up in her secret trunk of poems. School was almost over and vacation was coming, with parties and summer dresses. She had two flowered dimities with elbow sleeves, and some Rus-

sia-leather shoes. Then and not till then she looked round her to see what the new law was. She had made a dreadful mistake. She had waited too long and the crowd was souring on her.

They did not make fun of her any more; they were cold to her and polite to her—terribly polite. They were not leaving her out of parties; not yet, but there was no time to lose. Her clothes were right, her hair was all right. But what was wrong? All through the long dreadful month of June she could not find out. But last night, at the first evening picnic of the year, she knew. After supper, sitting round the fire in the dusk, two by two, all the other couples began to do something that she and Pig were not doing. She had promised mother once never to do it. It looked like a silly thing to do, and it had a silly name that she did not like to say. But you had to do it; this was the new law. She must do it, and Pig must. They would begin to-night.

"Well, Kitten?"

Sally Belle looked up and smiled, but did not move. Father was standing beside her, laughing down at her his nice silent laugh. You did not mind

when father made fun of you, though you never quite knew why he did it. He was on his way to play duplicate whist at the Sewalls'. He had come home late from the office to dress, and mother was there already, but he never hurried. He bent down and played with her hair, very carefully, not to muss it, and Sally Belle put her hand into his, and held it.

"How is the social whirl?" he asked, but you did not have to answer. You never had to answer father's questions. He could answer them all himself. "Still whirling? This must be the height of the season; I can remember; I was old once myself, just like you, Kitten."

"Not like me," said Sally Belle sadly. Father was never a freak. He was never left out. He was handsome when he was a boy; she had seen his pictures. And he was handsome now, though he could not wear white trousers; he had to save washing. He looked very tall and cool in his neat blue serge.

"You are nice," said Sally Belle, "I like you. You are the handsomest man in town."

Father laughed out loud.

"Like to have me take you to this party," he asked, "instead of Pig?"

"Yes," said Sally Belle with feeling. She explained further:

"You're not fat, you're not too good to act like common folks, you're not slow. And—and I like you."

Father stopped laughing, and looked at her in the way she liked best to have him, with his eyes very kind, like mother's.

"I like you too, Kitten," he said very solemnly, not making fun at all, "and I like Pig. I'll bet on you both, social whirl or no social whirl. Will you keep that in mind sometimes?"

"Yes, sir," Sally Belle promised gravely, "I—I'd be glad to."

"Then, good night."

Father shook hands with her in the pleasant way that he had, just as if she were really grown up, and then went off to his whist party.

Sally Belle felt a little better; father could make you feel better, without knowing what your troubles were at all. She felt braver, ready for the evening, ready for Pig. It was time for Pig to come.

The dark was coming fast. Across her lawn and Pig's lawn, in Pig's house next door, there was a

light in the back chamber window—Pig's window. It had been there for some time. Pig was dressing for the party. He was almost dressed, and when he was dressed he would call for her. Sally Belle sighed. It was dark on the lawn, and darker above her, up in the heart of the tree. Sally Belle loved this tree. She loved to look at it. But when you were not quite happy the waving branches looked far away, and the soft deep heart of the tree was a place you could never climb to, it looked so far. It was very far to-night.

Pig's light up-stairs flickered and went out. Pig was ready. His front door opened. It slammed shut. He came toward her across the lawn. Pig had grown so fast in the last year that he did not look very fat, only big all over. He had on a dark coat and white trousers and new shoes. He walked slowly and stiffly, and they squeaked. Pig looked just as he always did. In a changed and hard world, that was one comfort. Pig was just Pig.

"I'm coming," he called. "So's Christmas," he added conscientiously.

"Feet hurt?"

"Oh, no!" Pig stopped beside her and stood first

on one foot and then the other and groaned. "Feet feel fine. Feel so good I'm going to get them cut off to-morrow. Too good for me."

"Russia leather always hurts the first time if you don't put vaseline on it," said Sally Belle wisely. "I told you to."

"I'm not a dude," Pig objected, "nor a girl."

"No," said Sally Belle with some satisfaction, "you're not." She slid down the bank to the sidewalk. Pig followed and fell into step beside her.

"Hold your horses," he begged.

"Your feet will feel better if we walk fast. Besides, we're late."

"We'll get enough of it," Pig said gloomily, "and then some. I'm not much for these piazza shindigs. Nothing doing."

"There is," said Sally Belle softly, "if you do it."

"Do what?" Pig argued.

"Oh, nothing. Come along."

She led the way very fast up Main Street and into High Street. The concrete walk stopped here, and the board walk began. Pig's shoes squeaked hard on the boards, but he had stopped limping. When he stood up straight he was half a head taller than

Sally Belle. She watched him out of the corner of her eye. You could not explain things to Pig. He would never let you. She could not ask him to do this new thing. But she could make him do it. There were ways to make him. She had read about them in novels, and watched Madgie. She would try them all, one by one, till they worked. She could manage Pig. And just ahead was Pine Street, Tissue Doyle's street.

"Better now?" she said.

"You can call it that," said Pig. "Hey, what's the idea?"

As he straightened up Sally Belle had slipped her hand through his arm. She kept it there.

"I've turned my ankle. Can't I take hold of you?"

"Sure, I've got troubles enough of my own, though. Which ankle?"

Sally Belle did not answer. Arm in arm, they turned down the dark little street where the party was.

"Party!" said Pig bitterly. "Cats! See in the dark!"

Tissue Doyle's house was half-way down the

street. There was not much light in it. At a piazza party there never was. Bright lights in the billiard room up in the cupola, shaded lights in one room down-stairs, and the yellow light of the porch lantern, that was all; but you could see the party. They were scattered far apart, on the vine-screened piazza that ran all round the house, on the wide tree-shaded lawn. White skirts fluttered dimly, white trousers glared very white in the dark, a match flared up and went out, a mandolin twanged. The crowd was all there—her crowd. They would be her crowd again after to-night.

They sat two by two; you did at piazza parties. You did not dance nor play cards. You just sat there with a boy. It was a new fashion that year. Pig was sliding his arm out of hers. She caught it and pressed it tight.

"It's a lovely party. Come on," she said.

They crossed the muddy little street and the wide dark lawn and stood at the foot of the piazza steps. The groups on the lawn did not move as they passed. At a piazza party new arrivals did not create much excitement. Nothing did. But out of the darkest

corner a tall figure, all in white, rose and moved lazily toward them. It was their host. He pulled out a pocket flashlight and pointed it at them.

"Who goes there?" he demanded. "I'm the chaperon. Ma's out. Advance and give the countersign. 'Everything is lovely and the goose hangs high.' Oh, it's you, is it?"

His manner changed abruptly; it was polite but formal. He leaned down and shook hands with them both.

"I am pleased to see you. Where would you like to sit? Here?" On the front door-step, full in the yellow light of the porch lantern, there were two cushions. He arranged them carefully, several feet apart. "Your style?" he asked sweetly.

"Nothing to me where I sit," Pig began sulkily. Sally Belle pinched his arm.

"You and Lil can have the front steps, Tissue Doyle," she said. "They won't do for Pig and me."

"What will?" asked Tish coldly.

"That depends. Is the lawn swing taken?"

"It will be, by Lil and me."

"The hammock?"

"Stub and Madge."

"Back door-steps?"

"I'm saving them for——"

"Never mind who for, you can stop saving them," Sally Belle said firmly. "The back door-steps are my style, if you want to know. They are Pig's style too. Come on, Pig."

"What do you know about that?" said Tish weakly.

His flashlight clicked. He was pointing it after them. Sally Belle did not look back. Keeping Pig's arm and holding her head very high, she led Pig deliberately but firmly round the corner of the house out of sight.

Here, screened on one side by a vine-covered lattice and shut off on the other by the angle where the ell joined the house were two wide shallow steps. The house lights and street lights did not shine back here. The ell was deserted and dark. Mrs. Doyle did her own work and at night it always was. There were garbage cans here, and a big ugly wood-pile, but they did not show at night. The steps were granite and cold to sit on, but this was a favorite place. The crowd always fought for it, and Sally Belle had it. She spread out her skirts and sat down

and felt round her and found a cushion. It was little and hard, but she leaned back with a sigh of content.

"What's the idea?" said Pig, somewhat dazed. "I don't care where we sit." He sat down at the other end of the steps, crossed his legs and stared at her through the dark. "Say, what's eating you to-night?"

"Nothing."

"At any rate," Pig said judicially, "you look swell to-night."

"You can't see me."

"I don't have to. I did. That is some swell rig. You look swell."

"That's good," said Sally Belle absently.

Her white dotted Swiss was old, but the sleeves were cut to elbow length, and she had a wild rose in her hair; a swell rig, indeed; but that did not concern her just now. Behind her on the piazza Tish was laughing. He was laughing at her and Pig. All the others laughed too. She listened and waited until the laughing stopped.

"Pig——" she began then firmly. Pig made a

little, comfortable noise, answering her. "Pig, you don't have to sit way over there."

"I'd just as lief."

"You can come over here by me. You can have half this pillow."

"I will if you want me to."

"I don't—not unless you want to."

Pig considered the proposition.

"Too much work to move," he decided.

"Then don't move!" Sally Belle's voice sounded cross. That was wrong. She made her voice quite sweet, and began again, "Pig, don't you like it out here?"

"Like what?" It was a plain but difficult question.

"Oh," said Sally Belle, "everything! The—the trees. And it's dark. The dark is nice. And—and there's nobody else here. Just you and me. And we don't need them, do we? They can stay right where they are. We don't care what they do. We don't care at all. It—it's nice here."

"My shoes hurt," said Pig, irrelevantly but with feeling. "They hurt like——"

"Take them off."

"Never get 'em on again," Pig objected reasonably.

Sally Belle moved nearer to him.

"Never mind," she said very sweetly. "Isn't it nice here? Just you and me?"

"Good enough," Pig agreed. "Hey, get that!"

Even on the back door-steps you were not quite alone in the world. Out in front the crowd was beginning to sing. The song started in one hammock and spread to the others, to the piazza and all round it, until all the couples were singing. It was a ballad from the repertoire of a ten-twenty-thirty comedian. Nobody cared for the words, but the tune was popular with the crowd that year, a gay little teasing tune. They sang it quite loud, all together, almost keeping time:

Pa's got a boarder and he's very fond of ma.
I wonder why, I wonder why.
Papa doesn't like him and he doesn't like papa.
I wonder why.

They finished one verse, and another, and then stopped. A mandolin played the chorus half

through and stopped suddenly with the snap of a breaking string. Pig wriggled uneasily.

"Makes me sick," he pronounced.

"What does?" asked Sally Belle anxiously.

"That does—that fool song, and the crowd. Some fellows in it. Some girls too. Fools! Haven't got any sense." He paused, hunting for a clearer explanation. "Fools!" Sally Belle edged a little closer. Pig did not notice. He was plunged in gloomy thoughts.

"Well, Pig, I don't make you sick, do I?"

"No," said Pig with sudden emphasis, "you don't. You're all right. Worth ten of old Madgie Carr. You've got sense, you have—good horse sense. All the fellows respect you. They'd better. If they don't they'll hear from me. You're a sensible girl."

This was high praise, and praise was rare from Pig; but Sally Belle did not respond to it. She was silent. She was quite close to Pig now. She drooped toward him.

"Pig," she sighed, "Pig, I'm tired."

"You are? We can go home early. Go now."

"Oh, no," said Sally Belle quickly. "I'm not so very tired. Pig, how—how strong you are!"

"I don't know about that."

"You are. Let me feel your muscle."

"What for?"

"Oh, for nothing. I don't have to. Pig, did you ever have your fortune told?"

"Not so you'd notice it. Old Madgie stacks the cards."

"Not cards. Palmistry. You know."

"Sure I know," Pig chuckled. "Holding hands. Makes me sick."

"Me too," said Sally Belle promptly. She sighed and moved back to her own corner of the steps again.

Pig was lighting a cigarette. Tish could smoke like a man of the world. Pig could not yet, but he worked hard at it. He was working now, lighting one match after another. He got it going at last and puffed at it patiently, leaning over it and shielding it with one hand. His shoulders looked very big. He looked heavy and hard to move, like a rock or something. Pig did not even know that the crowd was cold to them, and the crowd had never been so cold as it was to-night.

Tish made fun of them openly. At piazza parties your long tête-à-têtes were broken by friendly visits from other couples; boys who sneaked from hammock to hammock and spied on you; girls who came and whispered confidences. This party was half over. It was almost time for refreshments, and Sally Belle and Pig had sat here all this time ignored and alone. They were exiles, frozen out, and Pig did not know it or care. The crowd was singing again, the song that Pig did not like:

Sister's got a beau. He comes to see her every night.
I wonder why, I wonder why.
They go in the parlor and they turn down the light.
I wonder why.

I went in the parlor to hear what they would say—

"Sing, Pig," said Sally Belle. "Let's sing, too, with them."

"Too much work."

"Pig, I'm going away to-morrow."

"So's the bunch," said Pig calmly.

"Aren't you sorry?"

"Why would I be? I'll be out there, too, every evening. Gang's all going. I'll have to go," Pig answered.

"Don't you want to go?"

"I'd just as lief."

Pig's cigarette burned his fingers. He put it out carefully on the stone steps, brushed the ashes off his clean trousers and rose.

"We'll get out of this," he announced—"get up a game of billiards. Something doing."

"They won't play," said Sally Belle with a little break in her voice.

"You will. That's good enough for me."

Pig opened the back door, groped his way through the empty, clean-smelling kitchen and on up the dark back stairs, and she followed him. One dim light burned in the upper hall, but the attic stairs were dark. Pig tramped up them cheerfully, threw open the billiard-room door and escorted her in with a flourish.

"Come early and avoid the rush," he said.

The billiard room was the pride of Tissue's heart, so he kept it lighted up for piazza parties, though

they never used it. It was not really a billiard room; it was Tissue's old play room, with his new billiard table in the center. The billiard table was bright green and very ugly, but everything else in the room was pleasant and shabby and old; all of Tissue's treasures; his printing press and magic lantern; a toy theater that he had built and Sally Belle had written plays for; a telephone he and Pig had made —it had never worked very well, and it was broken now; other things, too, that were not Tissue's; a doll's house that had once been Mrs. Doyle's; a sewing machine, files of fashion magazines, a mahogany cradle, a haircloth sofa. Sally Belle curled her legs up under her and sat down in one corner of it.

"I'm tired. You play," she said, and Pig threw off his coat and began to knock the balls about. Sally Belle looked round her gravely.

"This is our style, I guess," she decided.

And it was. A play room with toys was the place for her if she could not grow up and act like the crowd. Well, it was a pleasant place. In here, where the lights were bright, she could not manage Pig. Madgie Carr herself would not try it. Sally

Belle had not given up. Her campaign was not half over; it was only begun. But she could rest from it for a while and just sit here and watch Pig.

Pig could not smoke as well as Tish, but he played billiards better. He had a free, strong swing of the cue and a quick, sure aim. He looked quite graceful and light, stepping round the table. He whistled while he played—a queer little tuneless whistle—and talked to himself. He was playing a real game; playing both sides of it, and keeping score.

"I'll play now if you want me," Sally Belle said after a while, but Pig shook his head.

"Got to settle this guy first."

"What guy?"

"Tish. And he's putting up a good game, too," Pig added generously. "I've most got him where I want him, but if this shot works he may get me yet. Watch him." Pig took careful aim, squinting over his cue and representing his rival conscientiously.

"Too much English, old top," he explained to the imaginary Tish as the shot failed. "Good try, though. Now watch your Uncle Dudley." He gave one little, quick, careless-looking stab at the ball, and at once other balls hit one another and

rolled into position all over the table in a lazy but precise way, as if they had planned it themselves with no help from Pig at all. It was one of Pig's master strokes. He threw down his cue and the game was over.

"That cooks his goose," he announced. "Hurrah for our side!" He mopped his forehead, pulled down his sleeves and sat at the other end of Sally Belle's sofa.

"Serves him right," said Sally Belle.

"Old Tish!" Pig dismissed the subject. "Want to play or just sit here?"

"Just sit."

"Suits me."

"Me too."

Sally Belle put her arms behind her head and leaned back and looked at Pig. He settled himself in his corner, adjusting himself expertly to the broken springs of the sofa, grinned at her in a lazy but friendly way, and then became absorbed in his own thoughts. In the old days, when life was not so hard and so complicated, the crowd used to play up here, and she and Pig had often sat here just like this. She was happy then. She was not very happy

now. She turned away from Pig and rested her head on the broken arm of the sofa and closed her eyes.

"Pretty slick up here," Pig said presently. "Fools!" he added after a minute, and then was silent, pursuing this train of thought. "Poor fools! Say——"

"What?"

"Mind if I smoke?" He reached for his coat, got out his box of cigarettes, opened and shut it and put it back again, but he did not smoke.

"Here!" he said abruptly, and he pushed something toward Sally Belle—his coat, rolled into a hard, compact lump.

"Pillow," he explained. "Hundred per cent. feather pillow."

"Thanks."

"Say, can I have that?"

"What?"

It was her rose that he wanted. He pulled it out of her hair quite gently. The thorns did not scratch her, but the petals fell on her face. It was faded.

"No good now," said Sally Belle.

"Suits me. Wanted it all the evening."

"What for?"

"Fish bait," said Pig in a gruff voice. "Say——"

"What?"

"Oh, nothing."

Pig sat still on the sofa, playing with Sally Belle's rose; so still that the sofa hardly creaked at all. Sally Belle held his coat tight against her face. There were tears in her eyes and she did not want Pig to see them. She wiped them off on his coat, but more tears kept coming. She was too old to cry. But she was tired—very tired—and nobody cared or knew.

"Here!" Pig said suddenly. He said it in a cross, gruff voice; but the thing he pressed into her hand was a handkerchief. It smelled of cigarettes, but it was clean and large and very soft. She buried her face in it.

"I'm not crying," she said in a muffled voice; and then: "Oh, Pig, Pig, Pig!"

"Spit it out!" Pig commanded fiercely.

"I'm all right. Nothing's wrong."

"Something is—has been all the evening. You spit it out! Tell your Uncle Dudley!"

"I wish I was dead!"

"Well, you're not," said Pig with conviction. "Here——"

The coat slipped from under Sally Belle's head and she felt Pig's arm there instead. It felt bony and hard, but comforting. After a minute it went round her waist, and she sat up and leaned against it. She peeped at Pig over the top of her handkerchief. She could not see him plainly for the tears in her eyes; but it seemed to her that, just as it used to when he was a little boy, his chin wiggled. Pig was sorry for her. Pig was sweet. She moved close to him. The lights hurt her eyes, so she put her head down on his shoulder.

"Pig, they're mean to me," she whispered. "They're all so mean to me."

"Why?"

"I can't tell you."

"Don't you care! You don't have to tell me. I'll get after them. I'll fix them. They can cut it out and treat you right. I'll make them. I'll attend to them, all right. You just watch your Uncle Dudley."

"You're not mean, Pig. You're nice to me."

"Kid," said Pig very gruffly, "that's what you are.

Always were. Always will be. Twelve-year-old-kid."

"I guess," said Sally Belle shyly, "you like kids."

"That's my business."

"Oh!" said Sally Belle suddenly.

She moved her head on Pig's shoulder, opened her eyes and stared up at him. She looked straight up into his face. Pig's eyes looked down at her, puzzled and large and kind. She met them for a minute, then closed her eyes again with a soft little sleepy sigh.

"Oh!" she whispered. "Why—why, Pig!"

"Feeling better?"

"Yes, lots better."

"Kid!" Pig put a large clumsy hand on her hair. It was tumbled and rough where the rose had been. He touched it, smoothed it and pushed it back from her face.

"Pig"—she said softly.

"What?"

"Nothing. Just Pig."

"You crying?"

"No, I don't have to now."

"What's that?"

Down below doors were opening and shutting. There was a rush for the dining-room. Refreshments were served. Tish was rounding up the party; that was his step now, coming up the attic stairs. Pig started and sat up straight, but Sally Belle put her hand on his arm that was round her and held it there.

"You sit still," she commanded.

"He'll see us."

"Let him," said Sally Belle. That was all she said, but it was a song of victory, a lovely song.

"Let him see us!"

At last—at last, Sally Belle and Pig were spooning!

XII

SPOONING

Sally Belle was powdering her nose. There was one lamp for all the four bedrooms at Camp Carr. It stood on the crossbeam where the four partitions met. The rough board partitions between the four tiny rooms did not reach to the roof. The lamp flame flickered and wiggled—it was Madgie's day to trim the lamps—but the west-bedroom mirror did not blur very much. Sally Belle stared into it hard. She liked what she saw. The powder was the last touch to a correct camp toilet. All day at camp you wore bloomers and middy blouses, but at night when the boys came you wore white shirt-waists and skirts. Her white waist was turned in at the neck and a rose was pinned there. Her hair was done on top of her head. It looked cool and grown up. It came loose in soft baby curls on the forehead, but she kept them pushed back. She sat down on the lumpy bed and sighed.

She was alone up here, if you were ever alone at camp. All the girls slept up here, when they slept. Last night there was a pillow fight at twelve, and the night before she and Madgie sneaked down to the kitchen by candlelight and made fudge at one. Now the girls had walked up the road a piece to meet the boys. You could see the wood road through the window, with the sun setting red at the turn of it, and two white figures pacing slowly up and down—Lil and Madgie waiting for her. They would wait till she came. Minna Carr, the chaperon, Madgie's sister, an engaged girl—engaged to Jud Sewall—was in her down-stairs bedroom sewing lace on something. You could hear her rocking her chair back and forth and singing. In this crowded life, when could a woman think?

Sally Belle had been here three days. Tish reported what he saw through the crack of the billiard-room door, and after that she was not an exile. She had her old place in the crowd and more. She made up songs, led charades and learned to swim under water. She was happy, of course; but camp was not so much fun as it used to be. Nothing was. Was she growing old? There were no new lines in

her face, no wrinkles. She had been here three days. She would have to stay four days more. She could not get away or go home, and the days were all so long. They were as long as weeks, and the evenings were longer still. The boys came at six and stayed until ten.

The evenings! Sally Belle's face in the mirror flushed hotly under its coat of tan. She frowned at it. If only you could change things somehow—anyhow; be a queen like Madgie and make new rules for the crowd; run away from the crowd, into the woods, and hide; go on the stage and never come back to Franklinville. Sally Belle spoke out loud, softly, so that Minna, down-stairs, could not hear.

"Mother, I wish to go away, and at once. Do not ask me why." But mother would ask why; she always did. Sally Belle spoke again, kindly but very coldly.

"Pig, you and I must come to an understanding, and at once. Do not try to talk. Just listen to me. Pig——"

"Oo-hoo, Sally Belle!" Minna was trilling to her from below. "Girls are waiting!"

"Oo-hoo!" she answered.

Life, crowded life, with all its demands, was upon her again. She must live it and not try to think. She caught up her rose-colored sweater and ran down-stairs.

"I've gone," she called, and hurried out of the back door and along the wood road toward the girls and the sunset. They trilled to her and made room for her between them.

"You took your time, darling," Madgie said, "but you're getting to be a swell little dresser. Somebody will be crazy about you to-night. Ears burn? Lil and I were talking about you."

"Me?"

"You and somebody else."

"If you mean Pig, say Pig."

"Pig, if you must call a spade a spade. We made a bet about you."

"I don't care," said Sally Belle, skipping as she walked.

"Keep step. You've got to care. It's a peach delight, and the loser treats you too."

"What's the bet about?" Sally Belle asked.

Madgie giggled.

"Lil, you tell her."

"How many times has Pig kissed you? That's what the bet's about," Lillian explained promptly.

"Ask Pig."

"You're a cool one," said Madgie with respect, "but you have to tell. It's a bet."

"I didn't say you could bet."

"Will you tell if I tell first?"

"I'll think about it."

"Stub has kissed me just——" Madgie paused coyly.

"Lost count?" Lillian asked with interest.

"Nothing like that. I may spoon some, but I go slow. Three times, that's all. Now you tell."

"I can't," said Sally Belle calmly. "Nothing to tell. Pig never—never did. And no boy ever did, except once, in a game, and that doesn't count."

"Kidding us!"

"Am I?" Sally Belle smiled.

"Yes, but you can't fool us—not any more. We're on to you. Up to last week you had the whole crowd fooled. They all thought you and Pig didn't spoon. Lil and I thought so, too, and we showed it, I guess. We weren't very nice to you. I'm sorry."

"It's all right now," said Sally Belle.

The three linked arms tight and struck into a double lock step that they liked, and danced on up the winding road. The red sun paled and sank low, but kept always just ahead. Far ahead you heard horses coming and boys laughing. The bet was a silly bet. Madgie's talk was silly talk. But it was good to be friends with your friends again. Lillian's hair was a pale fairy gold in the sunset light. Sally Belle's heart danced in time to her feet. They came to the end of the wood road.

"There's the bunch," Madgie said.

"It's some bunch," said Sally Belle.

The Doyles' old two-seated carriage was coming toward them along the main road. It came slowly, for the whole bunch was in it—more or less in it. There were girls two deep on the seats, and boys on the steps, on the floor and hanging on behind. Two boys rode beside it on bicycles. They were Stub and Pig. Tish was standing up and driving. Both these things were hard to do, for his feet were planted far apart, among musical instruments, bulky packages and assorted fruit—oranges, bananas and two long watermelons—but he greeted the

girls cheerfully and pulled up his large patient horse.

"Less speed, Mazeppa. We're on the home run now," he said. "Gang's all here. Always room for one more. I said one more," he added severely. "Nay, nay, Pauline!" Lillian had jumped in, tumbling over a watermelon and into a convenient lap, and Sally Belle had her foot on the step. He pushed it off with his whip and started his horse. "You'll look sweet upon the seat of a bicycle built for two," he explained. "On to the finish, my Arab steed!"

The carriage lurched into the wood road and disappeared round a bend of it. Madgie and Stub arranged themselves neatly after a fashion of their own on Stub's bicycle, with Madgie in front and Stub balancing behind and standing on the pedals as he rode.

"Both break our necks some day," she called as they started. "Got to die once. Good-by, darling. You don't need us."

"No," said Sally Belle uncertainly. The bicycle plunged down the wood road after the carriage, and Sally Belle's eyes followed it wistfully.

"Care to ride?" said Pig.

He stood holding his bicycle and waiting. It was dusty and needed oiling, and Pig looked rather dusty too. There was a funny look in his eyes. It had been there now for three days—a hurt, sulky look. Pig was not so much fun as he used to be, but nothing was. It was not Pig's fault. Sally Belle put her hand on his handlebars and they started slowly down the wood road with the bicycle between them.

"I don't feel like riding," she said.

"Maybe I don't feel like walking."

"You can ride then."

"You can ride with the bunch. Don't have to walk with me."

"They won't let me. They'll make me walk with you."

"Well, I haven't got any objection," said Pig politely. "Have you?"

"No," said Sally Belle wearily. "How are your shoes?"

"Feel fine," said Pig stiffly, but he was limping. He looked at her gravely.

"What you done to your hair?" he asked.

"Madgie did it. Don't you like it?"

"Looks fine," said Pig solemnly. Pig had always

hated her hair done high, and chased her and pulled out her hairpins when she tried it; but those days were over.

"Looks like rain," said Pig presently.

"It does not," said Sally Belle crossly.

Pig thought for a minute.

"You're right," he admitted. "I guess you're right. Well, what's doing to-night?"

"A potato roast, same as last night. Minna's tending fire. We can eat by the time we get there."

"The same old story," said Pig, and they walked on down the road in silence.

"An egg," said Pig suddenly, "will bake pretty good if you roll it in mud."

"It will? I never tried it."

"Well, you have to take good wet mud, and not break it till it gets good and done."

"I see," said Sally Belle, and there was silence again, heavy silence.

"Here we are," said Pig at last.

He said it as if it were some new and surprising fact that he had found out all himself. He dropped his bicycle under a tree at the end of the wood road and started for the beach, running and throwing up

his arms as a signal as he ran. Sally Belle followed sedately.

"You don't have to hurry," she said. "Nothing to hurry for. Potatoes will be raw—always are."

"Looks good to me," Pig insisted.

He plunged down the rocks to the beach and waited to help her. She scrambled down the path, jumped from a rock into his arms and stood beside him. The sun was just going down, a red ball, slipping into the dim gray lake. All the sky behind it was pink with afterglow, and in the deepest bend of the long gray beach was a thin waving flare of new light—the driftwood fire. It looked good to Sally Belle too. It looked very good.

The crowd was busy all round it, just as they used to be when they were little boys and girls playing together, and not a crowd at all. Lillian was making the coffee. Her hair was in her eyes and her nose was shiny. Madgie was arranging the fruit and big saucerless cups and paper plates on a red tablecloth. Stub and Tish were feeding the fire, and arguing about a barrel that Stub wanted to put on. Tish was not being funny or grown up at all. He was too angry.

"Want to stink us all out," he shouted, "that's what you want! I built fires before you were born, stinker!"

"Stinker yourself!" Stub dropped his barrel, Tish kicked it into the water and they began to fight.

Sally Belle sighed deeply. If only all the evening could be like this! But the pink glow was fading from the sky—fading while you looked, just as if a big cruel hand were wiping it off, and in the deep clefts of rock and along the far stretch of shore there were black shadows already.

But now Tish and Stub, their difference of opinion forgotten, were dishing up the baked beans from the pots where they were kept hot in an angle of rock by the fire. Lillian swung her coffee pot to the ground, left the coffee to settle, and raced Sally Belle for their favorite rock. Sally Belle got there first and spread out Pig's sweater, reserving the seat.

"Supper is now being served in the Palm Room," Tish announced.

The potatoes were cooking fast, with a crisp smoky smell, and everything else was ready. The picnic had begun.

It was, as Pig remarked at long intervals while he ate, some picnic and some swell feed.

Supper finished, the crowd was all, as Tish said, too full for utterance, so it lay there on coats and sweaters, or stretched full length on the rocks. The big fire was not quite dead. The wide bed of embers glowed red, and out of it slender tongues of flame flashed up and tried to live, but could not, and scattering showers of sparks shot up toward the stars and vanished. Stub pulled the debated barrel out of the water and Tish helped him throw it into the heart of the fire. It smoldered and tried to burn. This was the time Sally Belle had liked best at picnics in the old days—the good old days.

"Pig, I wish they'd play something," she whispered—"hide and seek. Tell them to."

"No use," said Pig practically.

No, the crowd would not play games, or even tell ghost stories. They would sing a little and have jokes about one another and sit here; that was all. They were singing already, Madgie and Lil, Stub and Tish, the crowd's mixed quartet. They sang in parts, in close harmony, and very slowly and softly:

I gave her kisses one, kisses one.
I gave her kisses one, kisses one.
I gave her kisses one, and she said, "You've just begun!"
So I gave her kisses one, kisses one.

I gave her kisses two, kisses two ——

There were twenty-seven verses to this song. Sally Belle knew them all, and so did the mixed quartet. She picked up Pig's sweater and rose.

"Come along!" she said.

"Where to?" asked Pig, rising obediently.

"Somewhere. I can't stay here."

They started along the beach, and behind them voices of protest were lifted from all but the mixed quartet, which sung faithfully on from verse to verse of the song.

"Let them. It's nothing new."

"Crowd will guy us," Pig warned her.

"Oh, you Sally Belle! Oh, you Pig! What's your hurry? Where's the fire? Got a date with yourselves?" and one boy's voice, the last they heard, called softly but very clearly, "Oh, you spooners!"

"Knock his block off," Pig suggested.

"You can't knock all their blocks off."

"Can if you say the word. Be pleased to."

"No," Sally Belle sighed, and dropped the subject. "We'll walk to the fort and sit there."

"Walk!" said Pig.

You did not walk, you groped your way along, stumbling on slippery stones that were never there by day. It was black dark, all round; a sticky, thick kind of darkness that pressed too close. There was no moon yet, and there were not many stars. The fort was not far away. It was not really a fort, but a pile of rocks, where she and Pig used to fish sometimes, and play pirates.

"Take my arm?" offered Pig.

"Thanks, no," said Sally Belle, stumbling. "I can walk very well."

She pulled away from him and ran ahead. She fell once and picked herself up before he could get to her. She came first to the fort, a great heap of blackness, darker against the dark sky. She scaled it, scratching her hands and tearing her skirt. She sat on the edge of the highest rock, panting and breathless, and hugged her knees and waited for

Pig. He climbed up and sat beside her and rubbed himself.

"Well," he said heavily, "here we are again."

"Yes," said Sally Belle gravely.

Here they were. They had sat here last night and the night before. They would probably have to sit here every night all the week. The lake water made a dull, tired sound at the foot of the rocks. There was only the faintest line to show where the dark of the shore stopped and the dark of the lake began. You walked here round the curving shore; but from here you looked straight across and down, toward the crowd and the fire. They were not far away; they looked farther through the dark. As Sally Belle looked Stub's barrel caught fire all over and blazed up quite splendid and big, like fireworks on the Fourth. It was dead and the crowd did not care. The quartet had reached the last verse of the song, and the last kiss. You could not hear all the words, but the voices sounded sweet:

Gave her kisses twenty-seven, and she said,
"I am in heaven."
So I kept a kissing on, kissing on.

Kisses! Would Sally Belle ever have to kiss Pig? She looked at him. He looked changed somehow, even in the dark—bigger and heavier. He was resting, not moving at all, not even smoking. She wished he would smoke. This stranger, this big stupid lump of a boy that she had to sit with here was not Pig at all, and she wanted Pig. She had wanted him all the week. He would never come back, or play with her or be any fun again. It was very sad, so sad that you could not cry. It was the saddest thing in the changed and empty world.

"Well," said Pig. He cleared his throat, but said nothing more; moved closer to her along the rock.

"It's not dark yet," said Sally Belle breathlessly. "I mean, it keeps getting darker. The moon's not up yet."

"Won't be for an hour," Pig explained—"hour and a quarter," he amended.

"I know it," said Sally Belle. "I—I know it, but I—I——"

Pig edged closer, quite close.

"Bad sky. Looks like rain to-morrow," he said very solemnly. "Well ——" He raised his right arm, pushed it cautiously along the rock behind her

and closed it round Sally Belle's waist. She relaxed and leaned against it, shutting her eyes.

"Looks like a heavy rain-storm to-morrow," Pig announced brightly.

Sally Belle did not contradict him.

"I was out gunning to-day with Free Foster and Jud Sewall. Didn't get anything."

"You never do."

"But I like them. I like them fine. I like all the older fellows. They have some sense. Free is a fine fellow too. I had quite a little talk with Free."

Sally Belle did not answer. Pig breathed deeply and wiggled. He was trying to think of something more to say.

"Lots of fellows going to supe in the next ten-twenty-thirt," he announced. "I may try it. Good idea?"

"Good enough."

"May not, though. Work like a horse. Where's the sense to that?"

"I don't know."

"Gang at the Falls are framing up a tennis tournament. Tish can lick their old Gus Carr with one hand tied. They don't know it yet. Will soon. Stub

talks of having prizes at his next card party. Comes pretty close to gambling."

"Yes."

"No real harm in it."

"No."

"Free got an eight-pound haddock, deep-sea fishing. Sis Clark's blown himself to a purple tie. You can hear it two streets away. Say, I heard a good joke on him."

"You did?"

"Maybe you don't want to hear it."

"I don't."

"Maybe you don't feel like talking."

"I don't."

Pig stopped talking, and sighed with relief from the strain. He groped for her hand, found it and held it, fumbling with it like a loose handshake. She let it lie limp in his. She sat still, very still.

It was quiet here on the rocks. The crowd did not sing again. If only they would sing—any song, the silliest song. If the fire would blaze up again, or a wave from the lake wash up over the rocks and sweep you into the water. But lakes did not have waves, and that would not happen. Nothing would.

This night was just like last night; and all the nights, all the picnics, were going to be like this, all the time, forever. A big sob rose in her throat. She swallowed it.

If only Pig would speak again, and say something —anything. But he did not speak. He was holding her hand quite tight. She looked down at her hand and Pig's. They looked little and queer and white, and not like hands at all. Pig drew a long, deep breath. His arm round her waist felt tighter. She tried to speak, but she could not. She sat still. Pig's head leaned toward her. Pig's face came close to her face and touched it. His cheek pressed tight against hers. It rested there. It moved ——

"Harold Plummer," Sally Belle said, "if you kiss me I'll jump into the lake! You take your arm off my waist! Don't you ever put it there again!"

"What—what's that?"

"I'm through," said Sally Belle, "that's what it is! I can't stand it. I tried to, and I can't. I don't like it. I—I hate it. And I hate the whole crowd, too, and I hate you, Harold Plummer. I don't care if you never speak to me again. I'm through!"

"Through what?"

"Spooning," said Sally Belle.

Pig's arm had dropped from her shoulders. She threw herself down on the rocks and lay there. She was trembling all over. The trembling stopped, a few tears came, then they stopped too. A great calm descended upon her. What had she done? That angry voice, speaking those words to Pig, was her own voice. Pig would not go with her any more. Nobody would. The crowd would freeze her out forever. This was the end, and she was glad—glad all over. But what would Pig do now? What would he say? She winked the tears out of her eyes and sat up and looked at him.

He had not moved while she lay there. He had taken the blow in silence. He was very angry, of course. He was too angry to speak. And all this was not his fault. She was a little sorry for Pig. She was very sorry for Pig. She wished he would speak to her. He cleared his throat, sighed once, very deeply, and spoke.

"Thank the lord!" he said.

"What for?" gasped Sally Belle.

"You're all right," said Pig. "Shake!"

His hand reached out. Sally Belle put hers into it. He shook it solemnly, once, and let it go.

"You're all right," he repeated earnestly. Then he was silent as if he had nothing more to say. Sally Belle's heart beat quite fast.

"Pig," she said softly, "what do you mean? You don't mean that you don't like it either—spooning! Oh, Pig!"

"Like it? No fellow likes it that's not soft as mush. The girls like it. They ask for it. A girl thinks you don't like her if you don't spoon. You have to spoon. You're my girl. I'll do what you want. I—I always will. But you are the best of the bunch, and I thought you had sense, and then at Tish's darn party you—you——"

"I tried to make you spoon," said Sally Belle bravely.

"I know it. I've got the use of my eyes. My brains, too."

"I guess you have," said Sally Belle meekly. "Pig, are you sure—sure they don't like to spoon? Anybody? Madgie?"

"Madgie's soft," Pig explained simply—"born

soft and she'll die soft. A crowd likes it some, after they get into it. Some crowds are spooning crowds; get into it and keep it up. Our crowd is a good old crowd—a sporting bunch. Spooning won't last with them. Be all over by next year—dead, same as ping-pong and blindman's buff."

"How do you know?"

"Use my brains. And I had a talk with Free about it."

"You did?" said Sally Belle humbly.

"Sure! Free's all right. He's a white man. Question is, what do you want to do now? Quit cold and let the crowd can us or make a bluff at it?"

"I don't care," said Sally Belle.

"You're tired. Here ——"

Pig rolled his sweater into a pillow and pushed it behind her back.

"Take half?"

"I don't need it."

Pig arranged himself deliberately, full length on the rock at her feet, very close to her. He leaned his chin on his hands and looked down into the dark water. The dark was a different dark now, a soft pleasing dark. It took care of you. It rocked you

to sleep. By and by Sally Belle would think more about all this. Just now she could not think. She was too happy. She hugged Pig's sweater tight.

"Some fun now," said Pig softly, "sitting on a rock."

"Yes. Pig, if the crowd cans us I don't care, as long as I've got you."

"You've got me all right. Say, just now when you flared up I wasn't going to—you know ——"

"Kiss me?"

"Yes. Kissing's not in my line. Never will be. But if it was I wouldn't kiss any girl that didn't want to be kissed. Get that, do you?"

Sally Belle made a soft little sound that meant yes.

"I won't kiss you until you ask me to."

"You'll have to wait quite a while."

"I can wait," said Pig.

He laughed, and Sally Belle laughed with him, just as she always used to at their sweetest, most secret jokes. Down at the foot of the rock the water made a little pleasant noise as if it were laughing too. The fire was quite dead now, and through the soft heavy dark you could not see the crowd.

"Poor fools!" said Pig. "In it up to their necks, every last one of them!" There was scorn in his voice, the scorn of gods for a mortal.

"Spooning!"

XIII

NOT SPEAKING

Across the street, high up in the Palace Hotel, a lamp was burning.

It lighted the little dormer window faintly. It was only a small, glass hand lamp, that smoked and smelled, perhaps, like all the hotel lamps, if you did not know whose lamp it was. Sally Belle knew. She sat alone under the tree on her lawn, and hugged her knees tight with her arms, and looked at it.

"Beloved!" she whispered.

"Good night," she went on softly after a minute, "good night, beloved. . . . To—to be near thee—" These were words from a song. The tune of the song was sweet, but the words were sweeter. They thrilled and sighed. And they were not sweet enough. No words could be. It was better just to sit silent, alone with the light.

Other lamps, other lights, twinkled here and there along Main Street and in the Square at the end. Down there they crowded close, like clustering stars. The band concert was breaking up. There would be concerts now every week, and dances; the Masonic Ball, the Firemen's Ball, the annual concert and ball of the Happy Thought Club; something doing every night in the town and in Sally Belle's crowd. For this was vacation, Junior vacation, the last and the best. Next year Sally Belle would be a senior in High School, and after that the world would have to end and begin again. But it was vacation now, and the Donald O'Dare Dramatic Company was opening to-morrow night.

They were due in town on the early express to-morrow. They would play at the hall for three nights and one matinée. Othen ten, twenty, thirty companies, other stars, could not fill the hall at a matinée performance. They advertised matinées and gave them up. Franklinville was the dramatic center, the county-seat, and in Franklinville, in the world, there was only one Donald O'Dare.

There were two other O'Dares. Doris O'Dare was just Sally Belle's age, fifteen. She could wear

her hair high and play leads besides her great comedy star part, *The Country Kid;* but all day she wore two yellow braids and a sunbonnet and played with Bijou, her beautiful, curly white dog. Doris was Donald's stepdaughter. Mona O'Dare was her mother and played all the best parts, and was married to Donald, though she was almost fat and quite old—thirty, at least. There was Dugan, too, the fat comedian. He was not very funny, but he was very fat—and a man with a big nose, who played villains and took tickets at the door; and his wife, who bleached her hair and painted her face in the daytime, and the extra men who did specialties and played little parts. You loved them all. You had to. The belonged to Donald O'Dare.

Donald was very beautiful, slender and tall, with sleek, shiny black hair in two curls at the temples, and blue eyes that could twinkle or grow tender, all in the same thrilling minute, and checked suits and crimson ties. He could play anything; Rube in *The Country Kid,* in a sandy wig, with a straw between his beautiful teeth; Rip Van Winkle; hero parts in dress suits; and wonderful drunken parts, where he swaggered and sang. He was poor when he played

Franklinville first, a barnstormer. He had only one dress suit for the company. He had no printed hand-bills to distribute at the houses and use as programs at night; he had to announce the name of the play from the stage each evening.

"Donald," Sally Belle sighed. "What's this dull town to me? Donald's not here. Dear Donald. Acushla Machree!

"Oh, wert thou in the cauld blast,
Donald Machree,
I'd go to see thee in every part,
And shelter thee."

Those songs that the crowd made for Donald! Those were beautiful songs, beautiful days, gone now forever. Donald was no longer poor. He was famous and rich. He carried special scenery, a fountain, a cannon. He bought new songs and old Broadway plays. His poster in front of the hall was exquisite, red and yellow and brilliant green; a clergyman choking a lady in evening dress, while a convict in stripes looked in at the window. His play for to-morrow night was the Broadway success, *One Night in June.*

To-morrow night! Sally Belle shivered. It was almost here. It might come out all right—things did sometimes, but sometimes they did not. Anyway, she was committed; the die was cast; she could not get out of it—the dreadful thing that she and Madgie and Lil were doing to-morrow night.

In the Plummers' house next door, silhouetted against a window, was a quiet hunched figure. Pig reading by the library lamp. Pig would not come out here and sit with her. Pig was mad with her. And—and Madgie and Lil were coming toward her now down the street.

Madgie held Lil tight by the arm and carried her curly head high; they had been quarreling, and it was never any use to quarrel with Madgie. Right or wrong, she got her own way. She was queen of the crowd. Sally Belle cast one hunted look behind her at the garden and the dark orchard, but it was no use to hide. She sat up very straight and waited.

"Hello, people!" she called elegantly.

"Ah, there, S. B.!" Madgie used Sally Belle's new nickname; very dignified; a name for a society woman and a senior. She crossed the street with small, dainty steps and sat down on the grass by

Sally Belle, pulling Lillian down beside her with an affectionate but firm hand. "Greetings. Star gazing?"

"No, I—I like to sit here. That lamp there looks pretty."

"Didn't he have that room last year?"

"Who?"

"Donald."

"I—I guess so."

"Well, it makes no odds." The queen arranged her skirts elaborately and patted her curls into place. Then she drew from her bosom a small pink envelope.

"Now," she announced, "we will get down to brass tacks."

"Suits me," said Sally Belle faintly.

The queen patted her knee.

"That's the girl! S. B. doesn't get cold feet. She's a dead game little sport, that's what she is, and I wish some people were more like her. I mention no names."

"I have not got cold feet," said Lillian sulkily. "I just merely ——"

"Tish is mad with Lil," Madgie explained wearily. "Stub is mad with me, too, for that matter."

"Pig and I aren't speaking," said Sally Belle softly.

"The boys are jealous," the queen admitted. "Boys get jealous. And they know something is up, but they can't queer it. They'll be busy ushering. What a boy doesn't know can't hurt him, and what a boy does know can't hurt him, either, if you just sit tight." This piece of wisdom was not new to the queen's subjects, but they had never found any answer to it, and they did not now. She smiled, shrugged her shoulders, in her best manner, and took from her pink envelope a thin sheet of paper, folded small and scented heavily with her favorite perfume, Flower-of-the-World.

"I will read the letter," she announced. "Well, S. B., what's eating you?"

"I thought we were all going to write it. All three together."

"You thought wrong then. Possibly you would prefer to write it yourself."

"I'm class poet," said Sally Belle bravely.

"This is not a poem," the queen explained; "it is a letter. A social letter."

"I see," murmured Sally Belle, and the queen cleared her throat delicately, and began to read:

"Dear Donald——"

"Could—couldn't we say Mr. O'Dare?"

"We could not. It's too cold," said the queen firmly, and read on without further interruption.

"Dear Donald:

"We are three young girls of this town and we send you this little token of these few flowers.

"They grew in the gardens of this town, the same as our deep respect and affection for you. The roses are not as sweet as you are, Donald, and the bachelors' buttons look just like your eyes. The forget-me-nots mean—but you are familiar, of course, with the language of flowers.

"May we not speak with you in a warmer language, dear Donald, and tell you of our deep affection and respect? We understand that you are a married man, and we do not wish to come between you and any one, or make trouble. Though still quite young, we know life. We merely wish to speak with you.

"We will wait for you after the show in the ice-cream parlor next door to the post-office. Peach delights are unequaled there. If you accept, wear a rose in your buttonhole when you come out to make your curtain speech, and we will understand.

We are seated in the second row, the three aisle seats on the left, and have on black skirts and white shirt-waists and red roses in our hair. We will close now, dear Donald.

"Hoping to see you soon,

"Yours sincerely,

"THREE YOUNG GIRLS.

"P. S.—The girl in the middle seat is the writer of this letter."

"I don't see much point to the post-script," said Lillian.

The queen flushed.

"Well, you have to have a post-script," she said, "in a social letter. You can make any corrections you care to," she added graciously. But no corrections followed. Sally Belle was silent. Lillian was sulky but impressed.

This, then, was the letter, the epoch-making letter which was to change the world. Kid Giles, Stub's little brother, was to sit in a corner seat of the gallery and guard the flowers. They would be wrapped in wet newspaper to keep them fresh until the crucial minute. The letter would be tied to the flowers with an elegant bow of satin, pink, blue and rose, their three favorite colors. When Madgie gave the sig-

nal—she was to take out a side-comb, comb her hair with it and put it back—Kid would drop the flowers on the stage. Kid was efficient and close-mouthed, and he would do anything for money. They would pay for his gallery seat, and give him fifty cents, twenty-five in advance and the balance the morning after. The plan was simple and complete, and it was a month old, but it seemed startling and new to-night, with the fatal letter actually written. Sally Belle put out a timid hand and touched the scented sheet; Donald's hand would touch it.

"It is a beautiful letter," she said solemnly.

Lillian wriggled uneasily.

"Suppose you can't get those flowers," she began; "forget-me-nots and all."

"Then I can change the letter and make up something else," said the queen calmly.

"Think you're smart, don't you?"

"I am smart," the queen asserted.

"Tish says Donald drinks."

"He doesn't."

"And Mrs. O'Dare drinks, too; and they have awful fights, and Tish——"

"Who are we sending these flowers to, Donald or Tish?" the queen inquired severely.

Lillian ignored the question.

"Suppose we can't get aisle seats. Suppose——"

"Suppose nothing," said the queen firmly. And, indeed, it was too late for vain objections now. For better or worse, the adventure had begun. The three friends looked at one another gravely. Lillian laughed a little, excited laugh.

"We're in for it," she admitted.

"You bet we are," said the queen; "and it will be the biggest stunt this bunch has ever pulled off. We are in for it and we go through. No more supposing. No more cold feet. I'll 'tend to Kid and the flowers. Lil and I will go down-town now and buy the tickets. We'll meet outside the Hall at a quarter to eight to-morrow. And—and that's all."

Silently, by common consent, three hands went out, met and clung in their ancient, secret grip. It dated back to prehistoric days, grammar-school days, but it carried comfort still.

"That's the idea!" said the queen. "Are you with me?"

"Cross my heart."

"Till death do us part," they responded, according to formula.

She rose, drawing Lillian's arm through hers.

"Coming, S. B.?"

"Thanks, I prefer to sit here."

"Suit yourself. So long." The queen patted Sally Belle's head in the superior way that Sally Belle did not like.

"Cheer up. The worst is yet to come."

The words were only slang of that year, a password of the crowd, but they echoed rather solemnly in Sally Belle's ears as her two friends passed out of sight down the street. She could hear them laughing. Lillian's laugh sounded excited and gay; her cold feet were forgotten already. Lillian was only a child. What did she really know of cold feet, of misgivings and doubts and fears? Sally Belle's heart ached with them. The letter was beautiful; a social letter, indeed; and with touches of poetry, too. She could never have written it. Would Donald really meet them? If he did, what would happen? They might take elocution lessons; go on the stage. Anything might happen—every-

thing. But Sally Belle did not feel happy. She felt ashamed and afraid, and she did not know why. She sighed. Pig's light next door had gone out, but across the street the light in the dormer window still burned. She looked at it——

"Pleasant night," said a gloomy voice.

Sally Belle pulled down her skirts and sat up and frowned. Footsteps had come toward her across the lawn unheeded, though they were solid footsteps. A bulky figure stood between her and the light. It was Pig. Pig was correctly dressed for calling, in white ducks and large, immaculate buckskin shoes, but he was not calling on Sally Belle. That was clear, for he stood in front of her with his hands in his pockets and his feet far apart and his head poked forward, and looked away from her, over the top of her head, into the tree above her. He appeared to address his remarks to somebody seated there, and not to Sally Belle.

"Some night," he observed; "and if anybody was to sit here long enough, there would be some moon."

"If I was not speaking to a girl," said Sally Belle very softly, "I would not sit with her."

"A person," Pig remarked, "if they sit down

under a certain tree when a certain other person happens to be sitting there also at the same time, is not necessarily sitting with them. Not at all."

He looked at Sally Belle out of the corner of his eye, but she did not meet his look. He sighed heavily, turned up his trousers and sat down by Sally Belle, leaning against the tree.

"A person," he explained loudly and cheerfully, "has got a right to sit any place that he wants to sit, and he's got a right to talk, too. Talk's free. No law against it. A person can talk to himself. Talk to a tree, too, for that matter. Some trees have got more sense than some people. Hey, Tree?"

The tree did not contradict him and Sally Belle did not. Pig patted his pocket. It bulged in an interesting way.

"Tree," he confided softly, "I've got a present here for a certain girl. Got it right here in my jeans. And it's not candy, either. It's something else—something that this girl wants, and I want she should have everything she wants, even if it is foolish. Well, she wants this all right. It's a swell present, Tree."

The tree and Sally Belle did not claim the present or reject it.

"Of course," said Pig firmly, "any girl that wants a present from me has got to speak up and ask for it. That's fair enough. And any girl that stops speaking to me has got to speak first before I will speak to her."

Sally Belle sat very still, as if she had not heard, but after a minute she also addressed the tree, looking far up into the soft green dark of it.

"Any boy that says anything mean to me has got to take it back before I can possibly speak to him."

Pig seemed prepared for this ultimatum.

"Donald O'Dare drinks," he said promptly; "drinks like a fish; and his wife drinks, too. I can prove it by several persons. I said it, and it's true. But I take it back. You hear me, Tree?"

If the tree heard, Sally Belle did not seem to. She clasped her arms round her knees and rocked gently back and forth in the grass as she sat. Pig watched her. He sighed.

"Girls are the deuce," he said; "hey, Tree? But we can't keep house without 'em."

Sally Belle did not acknowledge the compliment. She went on rocking.

"Tree," Pig began slowly and rather solemnly, "I didn't come here to give presents to-night. Not necessarily. Not at all. I—I had other reasons. Care to hear them? All right. Well, a certain little girl is going to get into trouble, Tree."

Pig paused impressively. The tree made no comment, but Sally Belle had stopped rocking.

"Going to make a fool of herself," Pig explained; "a darn fool. Excuse my French. Now, Tree, I think a lot of that girl. She gets notions into her head, but she gets them out again. She's a mighty fine little girl, and I don't like to see her get into trouble. You get me, Tree?" Pig's voice was quite husky and low, tender almost; any tree or any girl ought to have understood.

"Now," he went on, "I can fix things for this girl —fix them fine. I've got a way all doped out and I'll do it—be pleased to—if she'll just say the word." Pig waited, but no word came from the tree or from Sally Belle.

"Any word. Just my name," he coaxed softly.

"So that's how the land lies," he added elegantly,

after a minute. "It's completely up to the girl. How about it, Tree?"

Pig had nothing more to say. He stopped and looked quite hopefully at Sally Belle. She turned and sat looking straight up into his eyes. She looked at him hard for a minute, then turned away and leaned against the tree again, cuddling close to it.

"Tree," she said very sweetly, "please tell your friend I don't want his old present, and when I need his help in—in any connection, I will ask for it. And if he wants to sit here, he'll have to keep still and—and not talk to me."

This was final and very clear. It seemed to depress Pig, but not surprise him. He sighed, settled himself heavily against the tree and pulled out his new silver cigarette case.

"Light up," he muttered; "freeze me out if I don't, they're so cold to me here. . . . Fair and warmer, but not so darn warm yet. Well, I know when I'm licked, but I don't stay licked. Not long. Hey, Tree?"

He had lighted a cigarette. He sat hunched far forward, puffing hard at it. He could smoke now

as well as Tish. He could make smoke rings. He was making them now. Sally Belle watched them form, float and break. Poor Pig. She would speak to him soon and make up. Pig did not understand her. He never did. But he was very sweet to her. He was always sweet. It was sweet to sit here beside him and look at the light. It was a beautiful light, little and very near. Sally Belle stirred in the grass and sighed.

"Oh, Tree," she whispered, "Tree——"

For Sally Belle had a secret. It was too beautiful to tell, almost too beautiful to keep, but she had kept it all evening. She had it now, safe and warm in her heart. She had been alone in her room, looking out of her window, when the afternoon express came in. She had seen the hotel hack drive down from the station and stop with a flourish; seen the one passenger step out. He walked to the hotel piazza with the splendid, swaggering step that was like no other walk in the world, and on the piazza he stopped, turned and looked straight across the street, up at her as if he could see her; and Sally Belle saw him. She saw his check suit—a bigger check than last year—his crimson tie, his smile, and for one

wonderful minute, his eyes. He had arrived a day in advance, unheralded, like a king traveling incognito. She did not know why nor care. His high concerns were beyond her. Anyway, he was here.

That was her secret. Nothing else mattered. She was not afraid any more about to-morrow night. She was happy. Madgie and Lil did not know it, Pig did not know it, but she knew. He was here, under the same starless sky, breathing the same air she breathed. He was up there now in that gabled room, and that lamp over there was his lamp—his. Donald. Donald O'Dare.

"Kind of nice sitting here; hey, Tree?" said a voice in her ear. Pig had edged closer to her. He wanted very much to make up. She was sorry for Pig. She let her hand slip out of her lap and lie in the grass. Pig's hand found it and tried to hold it, and held it. Sally Belle let him.

"Holding a person's hand is not speaking to a person," Pig muttered sulkily; "not at all."

"Tree," said Sally Belle softly, "tell your friend he's a nice friend to have and I'm glad he's out here with me, and—and it's perfectly beautiful sitting here."

"Good night, Beloved," Donald's lamp was saying. The worst was yet to come, but she had tonight.

XIV

ONE NIGHT IN JUNE

Sally Belle held her program daintily between two fingers, and tried to read it. It was hard to read; it was such a very bright green and the letters all danced about so. Only Donald's name at the top stood still and looked very black and stared at her. She knew the program by heart already; she folded it and slipped it inside her waist. She would paste it into her memory book. For better or worse, she would remember to-night. All day she could not believe that it would ever come. The day had been hard, and mother had made it harder. Mother did not approve of ten, twenty, thirty cent shows, even of Donald O'Dare's.

"The O'Dares are respectable people," she said, "Mrs. Sewall's hired girl knows Mrs. O'Dare's mother. She lived on a farm before she went on the stage. But she paints her face in the daytime

and their plays are not all nice plays. I would rather have you stage-struck, dear, than silly about the boys. But you need your sleep. And you saw *East Lynne* last week."

"This is different," said Sally Belle.

"That's what you always say. I don't see what your father is thinking of." That always meant Sally Belle was to have her own way, and she had it. To-night was here at last and she was here—here in the left-aisle seat in the second row, with Madgie and Lil beside her, whispering, with their heads close together. She sat up straight and smiled bravely and looked round her at the hall.

"A sea of faces," that was what you saw. The hall was more than half full. Behind her, in the three back rows, the peanut rows, little boys, crowded close together, stamped their feet and clapped; up in the gallery in the twenty-cent seats girls and boys sat two by two with boxes of candy to eat; and all round her in the thirty-cent seats was the cream of the audience; a Donald O'Dare audience; mothers and fathers, who all approved of Donald; theater parties made up to welcome him. The boys were all here and ushering.

Pig had the gallery. There was not much to do, but he walked up and down a good deal and pretended that there was. Close in front of Sally Belle, so close that she could almost feel the heat, the footlights were lighted; kerosene lamps; but the smell was like no other kerosene, no other smell in the world.

"Gone to sleep, S. B.?" Madgie asked in her sharp little voice.

"Not exactly."

"How's your nerve?"

"Quite well, I thank you."

"Lil's lost hers."

"Who wouldn't?" Lillian demanded. "There's a whole crowd here from the Falls eating marshmallows two rows behind us."

"Let them eat. Did you think we'd be alone in the hall?"

"I don't care to make a fool of myself before the whole town," Lillian objected weakly, and subsided, staring at her program with sulky, big, blue eyes.

Madgie leaned close to Sally Belle, wafting Flower-of-the-World perfume.

"Bend your head back, S. B.," she whispered. "Can you see Kid?"

"I can see the flowers."

Kid's seat, the end seat in the gallery, close to the stage, held a bulky newspaper package, and nothing else.

"I don't like the looks of it. I don't like the way Kid acts."

"He acts all right," said Sally Belle absently.

"He's got the whole fifty cents. Got it out of me this morning. Then he tried to duck into Doyle's store and hide from me this afternoon. He's scared of me. And where is he?"

"Right there," said Sally Belle. A very small, very black-haired and red-cheeked boy had climbed over the rear benches into the front row of gallery seats. He slid into his place and sat there holding the flowers firmly between his knees. He stared solemnly at the old green curtain that hid the stage. Madgie watched him anxiously.

"I can't get his eye," she complained.

"You don't have to. Not yet. When are you going to have him—you know—do it?" asked Sally Belle.

"Some time in the first act. If you see a good chance before I do, you can pinch me. S. B., aren't you scared at all?"

"No, but you are. It's almost time to begin. Don't let's talk any more."

Madgie flushed and was silent. She was really scared, Madgie, the queen. Well, Sally Belle was not. You could not be, it was all too exciting. You were in the hands of fate. Let the adventure go on. Let the curtain rise.

The curtain bulged at one corner. Some one was looking through it; looking at her, perhaps. Donald? The piano was behind the scenes and some one was fingering it lightly, going to play. A tune came from it—*Egypt,* soft and slow, with loud, bangy chords. The boys in the peanut rows kept time to it with their feet. The curtain creaked, lifted slowly an inch or two, stuck, dropped, and moved again smoothly and quickly all the way up, and you saw the stage.

"Scene, a room in the parsonage, Pleasantville. Time, one night in June. Maggie, a waif, maid in the parsonage, Doris O'Dare," the program said.

You saw a rose-lit room and a girl in the corner, playing. Sally Belle leaned forward, enchanted, noting details.

The back drop was the old drawing-room drop that all companies used at the hall, gray with three gilt arches; but in the arches chintz curtains hung; cushions were everywhere; and there was a screen, too, covered with chintz. The banquet lamp and the piano lamp were rented from Doyle's store, and so were the two chairs. They were the chairs that Doyle always rented; the gilt one and the green Morris chair; but the red plush sofa was almost new. Behind it was something strange—a safe. What was it doing in a room in a parsonage, Pleasantville?

The girl at the piano was rising, coming to the front of the stage. She carried a red feather duster and wore a black, maid's dress and a frilly apron and cap. The dress was too short and showed her slender, silk stockinged legs to the knee. She had grown an inch since last year, but her yellow hair was as yellow as ever, and her shy smile just as sweet. Doris O'Dare! She spoke, in her high clear voice, that was just the same in all her parts.

"Master is late to-night; but when the cat's away the mice will play."

Sally Belle settled back in her seat with a sigh of content. Doris would tell what the play was about; maids always did. She was dusting the gilt chair with the tip of her duster and talking fast but distinctly, so that the audience would understand the plot.

"Master is often late, and he is so gloomy in these days, so sad and strange, that I dare not play or sing. He has quarreled with Miss Alice. A lover's quarrel? Are they really engaged? She is too young for a minister's wife; too gay and bright; but since Master Charlie left, I have not seen her smile. Dear Master Charlie, where are you to-night? Ah, me, I wonder."

Charleworth Strong, brother to the Reverend Stephen Strong, and alias Charlie the Dope; that was Donald O'Dare. He was the black sheep. He gambled and drank and he had done something wrong about papers and a will and a bank and a mortgage and Miss Alice's money. The papers were lost, and they had to be found before twelve o'clock to-night, or Miss Alice would lose her home. Doris

wanted some papers, too, to prove who she was. She had been left at the parsonage door in a basket when she was a little baby. She wanted a mother's love, a father's care. It was a beautiful plot, a beautiful play.

Doris wiped her eyes on her apron. Both chairs were dusted, so she went back to her first chair and began to dust it over again, humming *Egypt* softly. She stopped and looked into the wings and listened. You could not hear anything there, but Doris could.

"Master's step? He must not find me here," she said, and was gone in a flutter of flying skirts. Her little dog barked faintly once in the wings—Doris would not act without him—then all was quiet. You could have heard a pin drop, but you would not have dropped one. For suddenly, with a lovely thrill, you knew what the quiet meant, and the empty, rose-lit stage waiting. It was early in the play for the star to appear, but you knew who would enter next. Sally Belle clutched Madgie's hand. It felt cold in hers. She pressed it tight. She pinched it.

"No," Madgie whispered, "not yet. I—I can't."

"They'll fade."

"On ice they'd keep till to-morrow night. I—I feel sick, S. B. I want to go out in the air." Sally Belle braced both feet firmly against the seat in front, cutting off the exit.

"Sit still," she whispered fiercely, "or—" There was no time for more. From behind the scenes, the mysterious region that anything might come from any minute, a voice came faintly, singing; a high, throaty, tenor voice; a voice you could never forget, and never quite remember, it thrilled you so—Donald's voice. Donald was coming now, through one of those three arches, out on that stage.

"Razzle-dazzle, razzle-dazzle,
Umpty ump, de ump, de umpty-ump—
Razzle-dazzle——"

You heard the words of the song, and the gay challenging tune, then shuffling footsteps and then—then he was standing there in the center arch, Donald himself. All there and more wonderful than you expected—he always was; his blue eyes, his teeth, his flashing smile, his black, black hair that curled. A tall hat was stuck jauntily on the back of his head, his high collar was unfastened, his tie

hung loose, he wore a scarlet waistcoat with bright brass buttons. He carried a half empty bottle. Beautiful! This part was a drunken part and he was drunk now. He raised the bottle high above his head, put it to his lips, drained the last drop and tossed it into the wings.

"So much for you, old friend," he said in a rich thick voice, his drunken voice. He walked with his drunken walk to the front of the stage and sank into the Morris chair and sat looking round him at his old parsonage home, at the audience, at Franklinville, with his blue eyes—Donald's eyes.

"A bad penny always comes back," he said.

A bad penny! That was a wonderful line, exquisitely funny. You adored him for saying it. He was singing, talking again. He was very drunk. He hated his brother Stephen. He was in love with Alice. He had come back here to-night to fix things for Alice and do something about the papers, but he could not remember what—he was too drunk. His head ached. He wanted to see his mother, who was dead. He made you laugh and cry all at once.

"Mother," he said, "nothing is changed in this old house of yours, only I, your son. If you could see

me now. Ah, mother—Alice—Sweet Alice! The boat rocks. Captain, stop the ship. I want to get out and walk. Stephen, my evil genius, I'll get you yet. But I must sleep now—sleep." He tumbled against the chintz screen, caught it and clung to it and laughed a lovely, drunken laugh.

"My bed," he explained, "most 'straordinary bed. It rocks. Don't rock the boat. My bed is like a little boat.——Razzle-dazzle — Alice — Stephen — Sleep—" With one last graceful stagger he vanished behind the screen. He lay there on the floor with one patent leather pump sticking out. He was quiet and just in time. Some one was coming; you heard voices off stage.

"S. B., I'm scared pink. Don't—don't let's do it at all," Madgie's voice was whispering, but Sally Belle hardly heard. The chintz curtains were parting and two new figures appeared, a man in clergyman's clothes and a lady in evening dress. The clergyman was the man with the big nose, who always played wicked parts. The lady was dear Mrs. O'Dare.

She was Alice Gordon, orphan daughter of the Squire, sweet sixteen and the belle of Pleasantville.

Her dress was white with blue ribbons, and her sweet little shoes were blue. She was not quite so fat as last year, but her face looked older. It was a kind face and she had a nice kind smile, like Sally Belle's mother, but she was not smiling now. She was not happy at all. Though he was a clergyman, the man with the nose was a very bad man indeed.

"Stephen," she said to him, "dear friend, it can not be."

"Alice, it must be," he answered sternly.

"Must? Those are strange words, Stephen, from you to me," she answered bravely.

But the man with the nose only laughed. He had a cruel laugh. He wanted to marry Alice, though she did not love him at all. If she married him, he would save her home, but if she did not, he would send her out into the world, a penniless orphan. She had to decide before the clock struck twelve and it was eleven now. And he had one more card to play.

"Speak on. I do not fear you," Alice said.

But she did fear him. Anybody would. He was dreadful. He got worse and worse as they talked. And the card that he had to play was Donald.

"Charleworth Strong. The man you love."

Alice bowed her head. She did love him, she could not deny it, though he would never know, and the words had never passed her lips before. Charleworth Strong had spoken no word of love to her, but she loved him, and she was not ashamed of it—she was proud.

Stephen could ruin him—prove that he was a thief and put him in jail. He threatened to. But Stephen had gone too far. Alice stopped crying and wiped her eyes. She was not beaten yet. She would meet Stephen here again in half an hour. Now she must be alone. She must have time to think.

"I am a woman and weak, but I will fight for the man I love as a lioness fights for her young. Look to yourself, Stephen Strong," she said, and turned and swept proudly off the stage.

The man with the nose only laughed his wicked laugh again.

"Mine," he said, "mine at last, but I must have food now—drink. Maggie,—where is the girl? Maggie—" still calling, he walked off into the wings.

And now the rose-lit stage was empty again but it was peaceful no longer; it was a dreadful place, where dreadful things could happen and soon would.

Wicked Stephen; would nothing stop him and save Alice? Was there no help for her. The screen moved cautiously, it was pushed aside, and out from behind it stepped a heroic figure. It walked with long purposeful steps to the front of the stage and stood there looking noble.

Donald, but how changed in those few short minutes, how beautiful. He was not drunk at all. His collar was straight, his tie was arranged in a perfect bow, like a made tie, and his black hair was brushed smooth. He looked like the hero of the play and he spoke as a hero speaks in a deep voice that came from his boots. His words were a hero's words:

"I have heard all. I am myself again. Now for the papers. Alice, I'll save you yet."

He was beside the safe now, bending over it, busy with the lock, touching it deftly with long graceful fingers. He worked fast and well. Would the lock open? Would he save Alice? You could not tell. For the first scene was over. The curtain fell quickly and smoothly and hid Donald and the stage.

Sally Belle sat spell-bound and gazed at the cur-

tain that hid him as if she could see straight through it. She heard all round her the loud applause of a Donald O'Dare first night, and languid clapping from the gallery and stamping from the peanut rows. She did not clap. She could not. Her heart was too full. The curtain was down for three minutes to indicate the passing of half an hour. The lights in the house were low, but you could see figures, faces—Pig in the rear gallery door standing with folded arms, like the villain in the play; the crowd from the Falls, eating their marshmallows—eating and laughing, when Donald was in danger; Madgie and Lil. They were whispering to each other, and looking coldly at her. Her allies were deserting her, but Sally Belle did not need them. She caught Kid's eye and winked at him solemnly once, and he winked back at her. The curtain was rising. She sat up very straight and fixed her eyes on the stage.

She saw it now through a kind of rosy mist. She could hear voices talking, but not the words they said. Alice was waiting for Stephen and talking to Maggie the waif. They talked for a long time, but

at last Stephen came. He wore a long crape coat that made him look wickeder than ever. He threw it off and gave it to Maggie and sent her away.

He was alone with Alice. He was drawing the curtains tight, listening at all the doors, to make sure that nobody heard. He had a paper for Alice to sign, a promise to marry him. He got an inkstand and a big quill pen, and gave them to Alice. She was going to sign; she was writing. Stephen was guiding her hand. She had signed. She threw down the pen and hid her face and sobbed, and Stephen looked gloatingly at the paper and at her and spoke cruel words:

"Little girl, you are in my power."

"No, you are in mine!"

The tables were turned. It was Donald's voice that spoke. Donald stood there confronting the guilty Stephen. Had he been there all the time, hiding behind the screen? Anyway he was there now, in the center of the stage—of the world. Donald O'Dare to the rescue. And what a rescuer he was! He was radiant, splendid, a love for any lady. You could trust him with Alice's future, with your own—with anything. He had snatched the fatal paper

from Stephen, crumpled it and tore it, all with one fine free gesture. Stephen cowered before him, his hands held above his head, and Alice sobbed softly and stared at him. And in Donald's hand, pointed straight at Stephen's black heart, was a lovely, gleaming revolver.

It was a wonderful picture, a wonderful moment. There could be no moment like it in this play or any play. Now was the time to act, and it was not hard. Promptly, as if some force outside her had moved it, Sally Belle's hand went out and touched Madgie's head, her hair, her side-comb. She jerked it out, waved it in the air once, twice, and pushed it back into Madgie's hair again. Madgie struggled and whispered, but Sally Belle did not listen. She did not look at Madgie or Kid. She looked at the stage, at Donald, Donald O'Dare.

"And thus we three meet again," Donald said in his deepest voice. "You give but a cold welcome to the prodigal. Is there no greeting here? No word for me?"

For a minute, there was not. The whole audience was silent, breathless, hanging on Donald's words. The gallery was under his spell and not a

candy box rustled there. Even the peanut rows were quiet. Not a whisper, not a sound broke that thrilling silence. And then—then it happened. Kid rose in his place, took aim and flung out his arm and threw. Kid was earning his money. He threw with all the strength of a promising baseball arm and his aim was good. Down from the gallery, straight at the noble head of the hero, came—what was it? Something shapeless and large and hard, something grotesque and horrible; a cabbage, a pumpkin, a cannon ball? You could not guess what it was, it came so fast. Donald ducked his head just in time. It missed his face, but it struck the revolver in his hand. The bright weapon dropped from his grasp and fell to the stage and lay there, with the hideous missile beside it. And this was the prodigal's welcome, the tribute of Franklinville.

It was only the flowers, of course, wrapped in their layers of paper, which Kid had not taken off, but you could not think of that. You could not think at all. Panic gripped you and held you. It was all like a bad dream, when things happened and you could not stop them, terrible things. Noises came from all round, laughing, applause, hisses. A

horrid sound came from the peanut rows; was it a cat-call? Franklinville was laughing—laughing at Donald O'Dare.

He stood still and let them laugh. His hat had fallen off. He picked it up and dusted it and put it on the back of his head at a gallant angle. Then, deliberately, he picked up the horrid thing at his feet, holding it between two fingers, and threw it into the wings.

"Any rotten eggs in the house? No? Then if no other boob wants to queer this show, we will continue the scene," he said.

It was a brave speech, a wonderful speech, better than any speech in the play, and Donald was wonderful. He faced the audience unsmiling but calm, like Horatius at the Bridge or the boy on the burning deck. He was a hero still—still Donald O'Dare. But Sally Belle heard no more. Somehow she had got to her feet and down the aisle to the door. She turned there for a last look at Donald. She might never see him again. Then she slipped out of the door and shut it softly. She heard steps behind her but did not look back. She ran down the stairs, out of the hall to the street, started up it, still running.

XV

SPEAKING

Main Street was empty and safe. There was no one to see her or stop her, but the lights all along it were like eyes that could see her. Her own house was dark, but one little light winked at her from the library window. It laughed at her. But the lawn was dark and the big tree at the corner spread its branches dark and wide, a refuge just as it always used to be when she was a little girl and cried. She crept under it and threw herself face down on the grass and lay there. She was very tired.

What had she done? She did not face the whole problem yet. She could not. But one by one, dreadful questions came into her mind and would not go away. Had she wrecked the play, wrecked Donald's whole career? He would open the flowers, read the note, learn her name, and what would he do to her then? He might sue her for damages, write

about her in newspapers—anything. Anyway, she had lost him, lost Donald. Would Madgie and Lil ever speak to her again? Would—would Pig? Oh, the worst was no longer yet to come. It had come. It was here and now.

And some one was coming toward her, up the street, coming with slow firm steps, coming from the hall. Had they missed her already and followed her? Sally Belle shrank back against the tree as if it could hide her, and sat up and looked, then she lay down again and hid her face in the grass. It was not Donald who was coming, it was not an enemy, it was no one who mattered at all. It was only Pig.

He was standing on the other side of the street and looking across at her. He could not see her there under the tree but he would find her. She did not care. She was even a little glad. She lay quiet, waiting for him. He crossed the street, stood on the sidewalk, looking up, crossed the lawn straight to her, and stood beside her, watching her, then he sat heavily down beside her on the grass.

If he scolded her or laughed at her or spoke to her at all, she could not bear it. She could not bear any

more. But he did not speak. He just sat there, very still. After a while, she nestled a little closer to him on the grass, and turned her face toward him. She wanted to hold his hand, but she felt afraid to. Pig seemed to know it, for soon he reached over and took her hand in his. It felt very big and warm and kind. A sob came into Sally Belle's throat, but she swallowed it.

"Oh, Pig," she whispered, "Pig—Pig—Pig."

"That's my name," said Pig. She had spoken first, but he took no notice of that. He just held her hand. Sally Belle pulled it away and brushed the tumbled hair out of her eyes and sat up and smiled at him.

"I feel better," she said.

"That's all right," said Pig rather gruffly.

"What is?"

"Why, everything," said Pig with a little laugh. It was a queer little laugh, but she liked it.

"Pig, what happened at the hall?"

"I hung round to see how it came out, then I came after you. The show's going on—going fine. O'Dare's got them going, eating out of his hand, same as they always do. He's a swell actor, all

right. And I doubt if he drinks very much. Not like he used to. No great harm in drink. Not that I ever heard of."

"What—what became of the thing they threw?"

"Oh, that!" said Pig carelessly. "Seems it wasn't rough stuff at all. It was a bunch of flowers. Some girl had a crush and threw them. O'Dare laughed when he opened them, but he was mad too.—I was behind the scenes and I heard him talk about them. He don't like crushes. He's crazy about his wife. He's a swell fellow; swell actor, too."

"What girl threw them?"

"Search me," said Pig, lighting a cigarette.

"Wasn't there any name with them? Any note?"

"No."

"Sure?"

"I ought to be!" Pig chuckled.

"That's funny," said Sally Belle faintly.

"Why?"

"No reason," Sally Belle felt herself blushing. She changed the subject quickly. "What's that in your pocket?"

"Present for you. Two presents. Care to see them?"

"Yes, if you please," said Sally Belle meekly. Pig fumbled in his pockets and pulled out a package and a letter. He dropped them into her lap and smoked hard while she looked at them. She looked at the letter first, looked again, then sat quiet, holding it.

"Why don't you read it?" Pig asked softly, after a minute.

"I don't need to." Sally Belle did not need to. The letter was not new, it was old—two days old and it felt older, for it was crumpled and torn and the ribbon bow in the corner was draggled and limp, but it still smelled faintly of Flower-of-the-World perfume. It was the letter to Donald.

"Where did you get it?" she breathed.

"Bought it," Pig explained calmly, "from Kid. Yesterday. He told on you, but we had to beat him up first. We paid him a dollar. He likes his bread buttered both sides, but he's a good little kid."

"He's good and you're good too. You're good to me."

"What would I be?" asked Pig simply. He moved close to her and held the light of his cigarette toward Sally Belle's other present. "Have a look," he suggested.

"I don't need any more present. Not now," said Sally Belle, but she opened the package and looked. She looked at a big, shiny, unmounted photograph—a face. Pig's cigarette did not give much light, but she knew the face. It looked straight into her eyes with big eyes and smiled. It was Donald's face and across the corner ran a scrawly inscription. And the writing was not Pig's, it was Donald's.

"For the dear little girl in the end seat in the second row. Yours sincerely, Donald O'Dare."

That was all and Sally Belle could not have read more; in her eyes was a little mist of hot sudden tears.

"Why, Pig," she whispered, "Pig—"

"O'Dare fixed it up for me to-night. We're getting to be pals. He'd do anything for me. Some souvenir. Madgie won't be jealous. Oh, no. What's the matter? Don't you like it?"

"Yes, oh, yes."

"A girl that's my girl can't make a fool of herself while I'm on the job. And whatever she wants, I want she should have it," said Pig, very gruffly indeed. "Get me?"

"I get you," said Sally Belle.

Pig puffed at his cigarette, making round perfect rings. They were beautiful in the dark. She watched them. Down in the hall, lights still showed through the trees, but it seemed to Sally Belle that everything that had happened there that night had happened a long time ago. It was sad, but very sweet. Donald was hers again. Pig had given him back to her. And across the street in the hotel Donald's lamp would soon be lighted. She could watch it again as she had last night.

"Good night, Beloved," she whispered. Were the words quite so sweet to-night? Was the song a silly song? The new photograph dropped from her lap to the grass, and she did not pick it up.

"Pig," she said, very low.

"What's eating you?"

"I'm getting too old to have crushes. I guess I won't have any more."

"Not till the next time," said Pig.

"Not till the next time," said Sally Belle, very softly and sweetly. "Pig, I'm glad I spoke first."

"What's the odds? I'd have spoken first if you didn't. You know that."

"Yes, I know. Don't let's be mad any more. Not ever. Pig, it's funny——"

"What's so darn funny?"

"Maybe it isn't funny, but—well, Pig, nothing is any good, when I'm mad with you."

XVI

THE BOY FROM AWAY

SALLY BELLE sat on the front door-steps of the Sewall house reading a letter from Pig. In the hammock behind her Lillian Sewall and Madgie Carr were whispering and giggling and watching her, but she did not care. All up and down the little tree-shaded street the June light was fading fast, but she knew Pig's letter by heart. The writing was scrawly and black. It was on yellow copy paper, with blue ruled lines.

CAMP CONTENT, June 14.

MISS SALLY BELLE SMITH,

Friend Sally Belle: Arrived here yesterday. It is pleasant here. There are some pleasant fellows here. The cook is a nigger cook, and he is some cook. While writing these few lines to you, he walked past the porch and said, "Are you writing to your best girl?" A nigger does not have much sense, but a nigger sure can cook.

Will close now and write more soon. Am writ-

ing these few lines to let you know I arrived safely. The mountain behind this camp or shack is one thousand, five hundred and eighty-two feet in height.

Your friend,
HAROLD PLUMMER.

Sally Belle slipped the letter into the front of her new surplice waist and folded her hands above it, like the girl in the old engraving in her front hall, *The Love Letter*. This was her first letter from Pig, her first letter from a boy. Friend Sally Belle! That was not very romantic—it was not even good manners; but it did not matter. Nothing did, to-night. It was the sweetest night. No night that June, no night in any June had ever been so sweet. She did not quite know why.

"On such a night," she whispered; it was a quotation, she did not know what from. "On such a night ——"

It was a gray, still night. There was no wind, but the air felt soft and cool on your face, like your mother's hand touching you. There were no stars yet, but they would come soon; the sky was all ready for them, all smooth and soft; if you threw back your head and looked you could see deep into

it, up and up, with only the twilight, gray and thin, between you and all the big sky. Main Street looked little but very long. It led past this house and her house and the high dark tree that she loved, on and on, past the sleepy, far lighted town, straight into the heart of the sky.

There was a very old game, called Magic Music. Children played it; soft music went on while you played; it went louder when you played right and lower when you played wrong, and when it was very loud that was the end of the game. Music on an old square piano, tinkly and thin and clear; music that waited for something and wanted something. This night wanted something, too. What did it want? The stars? Music—Magic Music. The words were very sweet.

Sally Belle stirred and sat up straight on the steps and looked over her shoulder up Main Street. Something was going to happen; it had happened three times already while she sat here. This was the long quiet time between supper and late-train time. Main Street was empty and almost dark, but far up Carr's Hill, beyond the railroad station, she saw two lights, the side lights of an old-fashioned buggy.

It crept down the hill, crossed the track, crossed High Street and did not turn. It was Free Foster's buggy and his sorrel colt. It was the strange boy again.

He was boarding with Free Foster and tutoring for college-entrance exams. He had been in town a week and no girl had spoken to him yet, but they had all seen him in church. He had driven past the house three times to-night but he had not once looked in. He was here again. Sally Belle shut her eyes tight and put her hands over them, then she opened them wide and looked.

The boy was a Boston boy, in dark Boston clothes. He was slender and tall and sat high on the springless buggy seat and drove carelessly and well. He was bareheaded and his hair was a pale silver gold, like Lil's. He had a beautiful face; you could not see it clearly, but while she looked he turned his head slowly and looked at Sally Belle, straight at her through the dusk. He did not smile. His eyes looked very big and very dark. He looked away from her quickly and drove on down the street very fast. She leaned far forward and looked after him, but he did not look back. He was whistl-

ing now, an old tune, with silly words. College glee clubs sang it. She loved it. It was *Veazie.*

Way down in Veazie—I'm livin' easy—
On pork chops greasy—I'm livin' high ——

The sorrel was not carriage-broke yet. It was hard to handle. The buggy swung around the corner of Church Street on two wheels, and the trees hid it.

Sally Belle had stared at the strange boy—stared hard. If he came back she would not look at him. She would sit up very straight and not look at all, but she wished he would come.

Something else was wrong, too; she missed something. What was it? It was the girls in the hammock. They were not laughing now, only whispering, and very low, so that she could not hear. Sally Belle knew these signs. They were very bad signs indeed. She jumped up and went and perched on the piazza rail and looked at the two girls. Lillian blushed. Madgie giggled.

"Hello, darling," she said sweetly—too sweetly. "Come on in. Water's fine. Lots of room. Always room for you."

"What's doing?" Sally Belle asked sternly.

"Nothing. Never is, in this dead old town. Did you have a sweet letter? Awful sweet? Going to read it to us?"

"No."

"I'll bet you aren't. I'll bet it's some letter."

"It's a private letter," said Sally Belle coldly.

Madgie was jollying her, changing the subject. Madgie was planning something and leaving her out of it. She would not ask what it was. There was a way you could smile, that always made the girls angry, a little absent smile; she had practised it with a mirror. She smiled. There was a long, awkward pause. Lillian wriggled in the hammock and cleared her throat twice, but did not speak. Madgie fluffed out her skirts and patted her hair elaborately.

"Life's short," she announced; "can't stick around here forever. Guess I'll go for a little walk. Coming, Lil?"

"I—I don't care if I do."

"Good girl. You sit right here, darling, all comfy, and read your nice letter."

"It's too dark," said Sally Belle.

"Light the lantern. We'll be right back. Lil and I just want to take a little walk, that's all."

"Tell her," said Lillian sulkily.

Madgie raised her eyebrows elegantly.

"Tell what? There's nothing to tell."

"She'll find out anyway. And—and it's mean not to tell."

"I don't care to be told," said Sally Belle stiffly.

"Madgie and I are going riding. Buggy riding with a boy."

"Indeed?"

"What are you going to do about it?"

"Nothing," said Sally Belle simply. "What boy?"

"Don't you wish you knew? The boy doesn't know yet, but he will soon. And it's not Stub nor Tish."

"So I infer," said Sally Belle with dignity.

Lillian blushed very red.

"Madgie is Stub's girl, and I'm Tish's girl," she admitted sulkily. "I know that just as well as you do. I'm going with Tish—simply going with him, that's all. Tish can't own me; no boy can; it's a free country. You don't own me, either, Miss Smith."

"I don't wish to, Miss Sewall."

"You make me tired! I'm not a prig like—like some people, but I hope I'm a lady. I wouldn't pick up a boy on the street, but if the boy spoke first—if—if you came, too——"

"Thanks, I don't care to come."

"You don't have to. And I don't have to tell you every time I turn round."

"You don't have to tell me," Sally Belle smiled; "I know."

"You know quite a lot," retorted Lillian uneasily.

"I know this," said Sally Belle slowly—"a boy from away is different. They aren't like us. They don't act the way we act. They don't talk the way we talk. They wear different clothes. They—they're different. You can call me a prig if you want to. I don't care. And I don't care what you do. It is nothing to me—absolutely nothing. I'd do it, too, if I felt like it. I—I don't happen to feel like it. But if I were you I'd take any boy in this town before I took a boy from a big town, from Boston. A boy from away."

Sally Belle stopped. Her voice choked her; tears

were beginning to come and the girls must not see her cry.

"If you're going, go," she said coldly.

Lillian rose and stood shifting from foot to foot uncomfortably. Madgie, who had listened to this discussion calmly, jumped up with the assured elegant air which kept her queen of the crowd, slipped her arm through Lillian's and laughed a shrill little laugh.

"Sarah Isabel Smith, you've got a crush on that boy yourself!" she said.

"I," stammered Sally Belle—"I ——"

"Don't let her get your goat, Lil. A boy from away is the same as any boy, after you get him going. I'll show you. Come on."

Lillian came. When Madgie decreed it you always came. They hurried out of the yard, up the street and out of sight, with their heads close together. They whistled a tune, slightly off key, and kept time to it with little dancing steps. The tune was *Veazie.*

Sally Belle sat down in the hammock and pulled the pillows all round her and hugged them tight. She did not light the porch lantern. The dark was

best when you were trying not to cry. Lillian would beg her pardon, and kiss her, and make up. Lillian loved her best; Lillian was her own best friend. But first the girls would ride with the new boy at Free's. Madgie could get any boy she wanted. How did she get them? What did she say? She would get this boy and ride with him past the house, laughing.

Sally Belle watched the street patiently, waiting to see.

She did not want to see. She curled up in the hammock, hiding her face with the cushions. Her heart ached—really ached, with a little queer new pain. Madgie always flirted and Sally Belle did not care, but, somehow, she cared to-night. She cared very much. Pig's letter crackled in her waist and she crumpled it and threw it on the floor. It was not a love-letter, only a letter from Pig. She stretched out and lay still. She could rest here—sleep, perhaps. She would feel better soon. She could not flirt, but she could do other things that Madgie could not do—poor Madgie! Sally Belle could think long, lovely thoughts, all alone in her heart; write poems, too; only there were no poems in the world to-night. The late train whistled at the

Falls. It called to her like a voice. The train was the Boston train. It came straight from the cities, big strange bright-lighted cities, and stopped here. Anything that was in the cities could come here on that train—something wonderful, something sweet. Soon it would whistle again, nearer. She lay quite still, waiting to hear it. Poor Madgie!

"Sleeping Beauty," a voice said.

Sally Belle rubbed here eyes and tried to sit up. She had slept, really slept, and dreamed of something pleasant. The dream was gone. Was the voice a dream voice? No, for it spoke again, low and clear, close beside her. A boy was standing beside her, a tall boy with silver-gold hair.

"Miss Smith," he said.

"It's you," she tried to say—"you. I knew you'd come!"

The mist cleared from her eyes. She sat up straight in the hammock and hugged her knees tight and looked at the boy. She was wide awake now; awake in a cold alien world, and her legs ached. The boy was not a dream-boy. He was the new boy at Free's. He was not so handsome, close to. His

nose was not very straight. But his Boston clothes were quite beautiful clothes; smooth blue serge, and they fitted in all the places where boys' clothes did not fit. What was he doing here? She frowned at him.

"Miss Smith"—he pronounced his words in a close-clipped Boston way that she liked to hear—"pardon me for butting in, but Miss Sewall and Miss Carr are going to drive to the lake with me. They are in my rig, round the corner on High Street, waiting, the colt won't stand on Main Street. I came to ask if you would care to go, too."

"I see," said Sally Belle gravely.

The boy smiled; he had a nice smile, and nice white teeth, even and very small. Her rose-colored sweater had dropped to the floor. He picked it up and held it over his arm, smoothing it.

"Take your time," he said.

He was sure she would go with him, very sure. Girls always went where he asked them to, and flirted with him and picked him up on the street. Sally Belle smiled. She was afraid of strangers but she was not afraid of this boy. She was not afraid at all. When she was ready to talk she would

know just what to say to him. She was ready now. She spoke politely but very coldly.

"You have the advantage of me."

"The which?"

"The advantage. I have not met you. We have not been introduced."

The boy looked puzzled.

"I never ride with a man to whom I have not been introduced." Sally Belle explained clearly. "I —I make it a rule."

The boy smiled, and this time she did not like his smile quite so well.

"Your little friends aren't so choosy, Miss Smith."

"That is their business."

"They gave me the glad hand, both of them. I met up with them in the drug store. They're swell girls. One's a cutie, the other's a queen. The queen says she won't go unless you go, too."

"She will," said Sally Belle.

"Look here," the boy said; "I don't know where you get this stuff, but I tell you as a friend you can't get away with it. Not with me. I wasn't born yesterday."

"It's nothing to me when you were born," Sally

Belle explained; "absolutely nothing. And—and you're not my friend. We have not been introduced."

"When I count three I'm going, and you're going with me. One, two ——"

"Will you please put down that sweater?" Sally Belle interrupted firmly. "It's mine."

The boy put the sweater on the porch rail, folding it very neatly. Then he sat down on it and stared at Sally Belle. He stared hard, just as if he had not seen her before.

"You mean it," he said slowly; "you're not bluffing. You won't go with me."

"No."

"Well," said the boy, "you're a new one. A new one on me. What do you know about that? A new one in this jay town."

"It's not a jay town. It's the county-seat."

"Pardon me. My mistake. Mind if I sit here?"

"The porch isn't my porch."

"Ye gods and little fishes!" the boy said softly. "Say," he added respectfully, "who do you think you are?"

He did not mean her to answer, so she did not.

He took out a silver cigarette case and put it back in his pocket, unopened. He crossed his legs and sat still, looking at her. Sally Belle swung the hammock gently back and forth and looked straight into his eyes and smiled.

"You get my goat," he said solemnly after a while; "that's all I've got to say. You get my goat."

"I don't want your goat," Sally Belle explained. "I think you'd better go now. The girls are waiting."

"Let them wait," the boy suggested quite hopefully. "It won't hurt them. Let's go for a walk, just you and me—get an ice-cream soda. You eat? Don't live on hot air? No? No, of course not. I—I was joking. But listen: if Free Foster brings me to call, in style, may I come in?"

"Mr. Foster is my friend," Sally Belle admitted.

"Drive you round there right now, and have him out."

"How could I drive there with you? We have not been introduced."

"Introduce myself!" The boy rose and made a deep graceful bow. "Miss Smith, permit me ——"

"I know your name. Every girl in town does."

"Let's hear you say it. Go on, it won't bite you."

"Tyler Peters," Sally Belle said in a small soft voice.

"My friends call me Pete."

"Indeed?"

"Stung again!" The boy laughed a pleasant laugh, as if he liked to be stung. "If Free gets us all fixed up will you go riding to-morrow night?"

"I may and I may not."

The boy laughed again and turned to go. At the foot of the steps he stopped and looked at Sally Belle and he was not—laughing at all.

"Come here," he said.

Sally Belle got up and came slowly to the top of the steps and stood there, looking down at the boy.

Her heart did not ache any more; she felt happy —happy all over, and she could write a poem, a long poem about the night. The stars were all out now; there were strange stars among them, little soft newborn stars. She would call the poem Magic Music. The night and the stars were all making it. Magic Music!

The boy was talking again.

"I saw you in church last Sunday and I—I liked your looks. I made up to those girls to-night just to get in with you. Did you know that? I guess you did. I guess a girl always knows."

The boy's dark eyes were too big; you could not look at them. Sally Belle looked away from them, up at the stars again.

"You—you know a lot, but you've got a lot to learn. So long, Miss Smith."

XVII

GUESSING

The apple tree at the end of the garden was Sally Belle's place to watch sunsets from, but she was not here to watch the sunset to-night.

The Smith lot was half an acre; it cut straight back from Main Street into this old tangled garden. The evergreen hedge was never clipped; it had grown to a high marching army of trees, with the big apple tree leading. The army kept out all the world. Beyond, there were other gardens and houses and streets, but here you were safe, deep in a fairy wood, a sleeping-beauty wood. Sally Belle stood still and listened. She heard a voice from the house; Lillian was calling her.

The voice called again and stopped. She scrambled up into the lowest crotch of the tree. She climbed higher, carefully; her rose-colored dimity dress and her patent-leather pumps were quite new.

There was a place in this tree that she used to call her nest. She reached it and cuddled into it, leaning back on two curving branches, fluffing out her rosy skirts and dangling her feet far down. There was not a scratch on the tiny pointed shoes. She was very proud of those shoes. She heard the town clock strike faintly; she was exactly on time.

The sun was a round red ball, sinking into the hedge. It was going fast. Sally Belle sighed. The summer, too, was going fast—very fast. This was the last night of July. It was a wonderful summer, a dream summer of dream days. No two days were alike, and each day was a little more thrilling, a little more sweet. Everything was fun, this summer, more fun than it used to be; the old picnics and straw rides and the new parties that Pete planned. Pete had planned the party she was giving to-morrow night, a fancy-dress ball; and she was to go as a rose.

There were whole days when she did not see him, but any day when you woke up and the sun shone you knew that you might see him that day. Madgie and Lil had crushes on Pete. Pete was polite to them. He was polite to every one. He took Madgie

to ride more often than Sally Belle. Madgie had good stuff in her, he explained, and he was trying to knock some of the nonsense out of her. But he liked Sally Belle better. He told her so.

The red sun was quite gone now—asleep in the hedge, where it slept every night. The garden was touched with pink sunset light. It was a magic light. Knights in armor might come riding through it. Fairies might dance in it, hand in hand. You could close your eyes and almost hear their dance music —Magic Music. Music on an old square piano, tinkly and thin and clear; music that whispered something and wanted something. Sally Belle thrilled and sighed. If only this night, this minute, could last forever, without change; go on forever, just like this, to music—Magic Music.

She sat up on her branch and listened. She heard real music now, a softly whistled tune on the other side of the hedge. She twisted her mouth up tight and whistled a bar of it in answer. It was *Veazie.*

Way down in Veazie—I'm livin' high.

Then she pressed tight against the trunk of her tree, curled into a little heap, as if the trunk could

open and take her in and hide her. She heard footsteps. He was coming. He was very late, later than usual, but he was here. He pushed through the hedge, whistling low, to call her. He moved around cautiously, looking for her, then came and stood at the foot of her tree. He was all in white, very tall and straight, with his hair pale gold in the sunset light; Mr. Tyler Peters—Pete. He was looking into a corner of the hedge, where he thought he saw Sally Belle, and his dark eyes were quite angry.

"Come out," he called. "I see you but I shan't go after you. This is kid stuff. I won't stand for it. Come out."

If she sat still he would go away and not find her. She leaned far forward, watching him. One of her pumps came loose. She reached for it, but it slipped through her fingers and fell. It struck Pete on the forehead. He caught it and swung round and looked at her and frowned.

"Saw you. Saw you all the time," he said.

"You did not."

"Doubt my word?"

"Yes," said Sally Belle sweetly.

Pete kicked the tree.

"I didn't come here to play hide and seek," he said.

"What did you come for?"

"You know."

Sally Belle giggled. Pete wanted her to kiss him. All boys expected to be kissed sometimes, she knew—all boys except Pig. Pete did not really want it; he was only pretending. It was one of the games he played.

"Do I get it?" said Pete.

"What?"

"What I asked you for last night."

"Last night?" Sally Belle considered. "That's a long time ago. You—you were late to-night."

"I had to see a fellow about something."

"Indeed?"

"I—I've got a right to."

"Certainly. Go see one now if you want to."

"I don't. Come down."

"I like it up here."

"May I come up?"

"You might soil your white trousers."

"Come down. Give you till I count three."

"Count away," said Sally Belle. She swung her feet.

"You'll get cold," said Pete, watching them. Sally Belle drew up her shoeless foot and sat on it decorously.

"Give me my slipper," she said.

"Sell it to you. What am I offered?"

"Nothing. It's mine."

"Fine shoe. Double A width. Super-fine." Pete waved it.

"Keep it," said Sally Belle airily, "if you like it. I've got lots of shoes."

"Sell it to you for what I asked you for last night."

"One?"

"Just one. How about it?"

Pete stood frowning up at her. He was not really angry, only pretending; that was part of his game. Sally Belle laughed. She stopped laughing suddenly.

"Pete," she begged, "don't let's be silly any more. I—I don't feel silly. Come up here and sit by me, and be good."

"You," grumbled Pete. "Oh, you!"

But he put her shoe in his pocket, caught a branch of the tree and swung himself up, and climbed to a place beside her. He sat there hanging his legs down; beautiful long white legs.

"You're some little kid," he said.

Sally Belle did not answer. She sighed.

"Some guys," said Pete profoundly, "don't know a kid when it's kidding them. Your little friend Plummer, he's in that class from what I hear. Get his eyes open when he comes home."

"It's not August yet," said Sally Belle eagerly.

Pete laughed.

"What are you going to be to-morrow night?"

"Madgie and Lil and I are a nun and the evening star and a rose."

"Which is which?"

"I can't tell. I promised."

"You're the nun," said Pete with conviction.

"Don't be too sure."

"You're the nun, all right. Cold, that's what you are. Cold as a cake of ice."

Pete was starting his game again.

"Don't," said Sally Belle suddenly, "please don't.

Tell me about the play; the play with the beautiful song—*Toreador.*"

"It's an opera," said Pete sulkily.

He did not tell her about it; he did not want to talk. He reached for her hand, but she pulled it away. She clasped both hands round her knees and rocked back and forth and looked at the garden. It was her garden and Pete's. She would not come here often when Pete was gone.

It was night in the garden now. The grass was a dim web of lovely vanishing green, and the hedge was a heavy hanging curtain of black-green mist. The dark was coming fast, very fast, and you could not stop it. It was a cold queer dark. Things could die in it; beautiful things—fairies and Magic Music. Sally Belle felt sorry for them. A sob came into her throat, but she swallowed it. Pete was here beside her. He was not gone yet. She had August. She had this evening. But there was something wrong with it—terribly wrong. Pete was getting more wrong every minute while they sat here. Pete was so silent and strange.

"Talk, Pete," she said. "Talk."

But at once she did not want him to talk. She felt afraid, and cold. It was too cold in the garden.

She could not move until Pete spoke again. He spoke in a cold hard voice that she had not heard before.

"I'm through," he said. Sally Belle could not answer. She sat very still. Pete went on talking, all in that new hard voice. "Little girl, you've kept me guessing all summer. If you like me you've got to prove it. You can take me or lose me. It's up to you. But I tell you this—I tell you as a friend—a girl that won't come across is a cheat."

"A cheat?"

"That's what I said."

"What—what do you want me to do?"

Pete held up her shoe.

"You know."

"I see," said Sally Belle calmly. "Wait."

"Don't stall."

"I'm not. I—I'm thinking."

You did not really think, when you were hurt suddenly and very deeply; you just felt sorry. You did not need to think; it was as if she had always

known what Pete had just told her; always known what to answer. She swung square round on her branch and looked at him through the dark.

"I'll buy your shoe," she told him. "I'll pay you to-morrow night. You can trust me. I—I don't cheat." She moved close to him and held up a cold little silk-stockinged foot. "Put it on," she said.

XVIII

COMING ACROSS

A NUN and an evening star and a rose sat on the edge of Sally Belle's four-poster bed, masked and ready for the ball. The nun's cowl and robe hid Lillian's blond head and lovely slender figure. Madgie looked tall and changed in her black gauze and tinsel stars. Sally Belle was a flutter of pink cambric petals from neck to ankle—a garden of roses, not one rose.

The masks were all cut by one pattern, high on the forehead, with long ruffles over the chin. Behind them your heart might break and the world would not know. But though your heart broke, balls were still balls. Sally Belle had a duty to perform and her plans for it were complete; she would do it before supper. Until then she would dance; you could dance while Rome burned. To-morrow she would live in a changed and empty world, but she could dance to-night.

Lillian had quarreled with Tish about Pete, and had little interest in this ball or any ball.

"I'm hot," she complained. "I hate to dress up, and I can't go two hours without talking. I'll be dumb."

"No great loss," said Madgie crudely. "You can't talk till we unmask; you promised. You can whisper some."

"I don't see any sense to it."

"It's more fun."

"Who for?" The nun choked down a sob. "I wish Tyler Peters was dead."

"He isn't," said Sally Belle softly.

"How do you know whether he's alive or dead?" asked the nun unkindly. "A prig like you?"

"She knows, all right." The evening star slipped an arm round Sally Belle, who wriggled in her embrace. "Tish will make up with you, Lil. Anything can happen in a mask. Go on down. We'll come later. We've got a bone to pick."

The nun went, trailing heavy draperies disdainfully.

"I don't want to pick bones," said Sally Belle;

"I want to dance." But the star's arm held her tight. "What bone?" she asked coldly.

"Pete," said the star concisely, "and he is some bone too."

Sally Belle stiffened, but sat still.

"What about him?" she asked quite calmly.

"Three things," said the star, in the crisp smooth voice that ruled the crowd.

"I'm listening."

"First place, you have a date with him every night."

"I ——"

"You do. A little bird told me."

"He told you. Pete."

"A bird," the star insisted, coyly but firmly. "Second place, you have a crush on him; a worse crush than Lil. Pig's away and the mice can play. Third place ——"

"My guests are waiting," said Sally Belle, with dignity but without effect.

"Third place, Pete's not worth it. Pete is nothing to me; merely a friend, that's all. I'm going with Stub. But I know what kind of a boy Pete is.

I know it right down to the ground. He's a cheap city sport, that's what he is. Fun for a girl that can handle him, but you can't. Kid like you with your nose in a book ——"

"Can't I?" asked Sally Belle softly.

"Not a chance. You don't know what you're getting into. I tell you as a friend."

"If you knew so much why didn't you tell me before?" said Sally Belle. "It—it's too late now. I can take care of myself, Miss Carr. When I can't I'll come to you. Now I must join my guests. Come down when you wish to. I shall be pleased to see you." She picked up her rose-trimmed fan, waved it airily, and paused for a final word. "You're jealous," she finished sweetly, and was gone, in a crackling rustle of petals.

Madgie meant well; her words were pin pricks in a heart already pierced and bleeding; they were forgotten already. Sally Belle fluttered down the stairs, paused in the candle-lit hall, peeping in at the two long parlors, then slipped inside and stood screened by a high shiny palm and looked at the ball.

It was a beautiful ball, even to jaded and world-weary eyes. The palms and flowers were from

Carr's greenhouse, the floor was slippery with wax, and the carpet tacks made precarious bumps in the corners. The costumes were cheese-cloth or old clothes from attics. The boys had dressed up under protest, the girls were jealous of one another's costumes. But you did not care. You felt all round you the strange thrill that makes a party. You looked at a fairy scene, all soft lights and gay flying colors. In the dining-room, out of sight, Old Higgins was playing an old-fashioned waltz with a sleepy, slow swinging tune. The room and the world swung in time to it. You saw Columbia, three peasant maidens, two Priscillas, Santa Claus, very grand in a new home-made costume and rented wig and beard. He was short and he could not reverse. He was Stubby Giles. You saw the nun, her troubles all forgotten, dancing in double-quick time, with an Indian chief. The chief was tall and wore a bright head-dress of feathers and danced as only one boy in town could dance. He was doing the new dip waltz. The costume came from a real costumer in Boston. The boy was Pete.

Sally Belle put both hands on her heart and started forward. A dark figure blocked her way—

a monk, correct in brown outing flannel, with bath slippers for sandals and bare ankles that looked red and cold. It was Tish. Lil had told him about Sally Belle's costume, and he knew her. He made no attempt to disguise his voice. It was severe, like a real monk's.

"Dance," he demanded. "I've got a bone to pick with you, about a friend of mine."

"I don't care to discuss your friends," said Sally Belle, dodging.

The monk caught her and swept her into his brown flannel embrace and out on the floor. He smelled quite strongly of moth balls.

"I had a letter to-day," he announced.

"Indeed?"

"From a friend of mine."

"Pig."

"I won't mention names. I never mention names. But he's a good friend of mine and a good friend of yours, and I'm a good friend of yours, too."

"That's nice," said Sally Belle absently. The nun and the Indian chief were resting on a bench behind a palm. She could see only their feet. They sat very close together.

"I am a darn good friend of yours," said the monk solemnly. "I like you. I like you fine. I always did. But you're a kid, that's all you are, or ever will be. A twelve-year-old kid."

"I'm fifteen," said Sally Belle with dignity.

"If certain girls in this town," the monk went on bitterly, "can't tell a cheap city bounder from a genuine guy, let them fall for him. I won't stop them. I won't lift a hand. But I can't sit tight and see him put it over on a kid like you. You watch your step, Miss Smith. If you don't——"

"Yes?" prompted Sally Belle calmly.

"I'll write to a friend of mine and put him wise to you."

"Me?"

"You and Tyler Peters." The monk threw bitter irony into his voice. "Pete!"

"You are under a misconception," said Sally Belle. "You—you don't understand. You mean well, Tish, and I like you. I like you lots. But I'm going to write to Pig myself to-night. And"—she ducked out of the monk's arms with a quick little shrug and skipped backward, avoiding his grasp—"I can take care of myself," she said.

"Don't do anything rash," she heard Tish call as she left him.

She laughed bitterly. People let you alone when you needed help, and nagged you when you did not. That was life. But Tish had hurt her, and Madgie had hurt her. Santa Claus, cooling off alone in a corner, with his beard in his hand, looked thoughtful and gloomy, as if he, too, had a bone to pick. Between them they were spoiling her evening. She did not want to dance any more.

She would have liked to go and hide from the party in father's den, where mother and father were playing duplicate whist with the Sewalls, and drinking the party fruit punch before it was served; father said that chaperoning was dry work. But she was grown up now and could not hide, and she had learned that hiding did no good. You could not stay hidden. You had to come out some time and face your troubles. She would face them now. She would do at once the hard thing that she had to do.

She edged her way round the room to the bench where the nun and chief had sat. They were gone. The waltz music had stopped, and the party was

dancing on, whistling the tune, or stopping to clap for more music. Standing face to face in the heart of the crowd, clapping their hands against each other's, she saw the nun and the chief. She pushed her way toward them and reached them. She caught a flying string of the chief's beads and pulled it hard. It broke and the beads scattered on the floor. The chief swung round and saw her.

"Kidnapped," he said, and laughed.

Sally Belle tried to laugh, too, but she could not. He was dazzling, splendid; he had beads, wampum, a blanket, a battle-ax—everything. His bare arms were stained dark brown, his mask was a war mask grotesquely painted, with his eyes showing bright through the holes. Sally Belle held out her arms and stood waiting, a small but determined rose. The music was starting again, faster and louder. He plunged his arm expertly among the rose petals and swung her into the dance.

"Who are you?" he asked.

Sally Belle shook her rose-crowned head.

"A rose."

"I know you, all right. There's just one girl in this jay town with nerve enough to sandbag me

like this. Just one girl in this town or any town for me."

"Who?" breathed Sally Belle.

"Madgie Carr."

"Oh!" sighed Sally Belle. "Oh!"

"Look at me."

Sally Belle drooped her eyelids, hiding her eyes.

"Why the modest-violet stuff. Can it. What's eating you? Sore about last night? I had to leave early. I had a date with a fellow. Short and sweet —that's my motto. You're not jealous of that kid? Not again?"

"Kid?"

"The Smith kid. I told you all about her."

"Tell me again," whispered Sally Belle very low.

"She's got a case on me. A bad case. She'd like mighty well to start something, but I don't see it that way. I'm trying to knock the nonsense out of her. There's some good stuff in her. She's a good little kid. But she's not in your class. Get me?"

"I get you." Sally Belle pressed closer against the wampum and beads. "Don't talk," she whispered. "Dance."

They danced. He held her very tight, so that she seemed to be flying. Beautiful words came singing into her head, as they always did when she danced: *The Last Waltz.*

That was the name of something, a picture or a song. *The Last Ride Together*—that was the name of something, too, a verse from a poem that she had written herself:

> The stately swaying minuet,
> Through which a thrill of intrigue ran,
> The whispering words of ill intent,
> Half heard behind a waving fan—

A thrill of intrigue. It was all round her, in strange, bulky, costumed figures, in the chief's masked face so close to hers. Old Higgins played like a whole band of fiddlers, not one; gypsy fiddlers, playing in the dark, hungry and cold and happy.

"Who cares if the world should end to-night?" she whispered.

"I don't get you," said the chief.

They were close to a long casement window. Sally Belle stopped dancing and slipped out of his arms, and pushed the window wide. She stepped

through it and stood framed in it, waiting. All her pink petals fluttered.

"Come," she said.

He followed her and she shut the window tight behind them, with all the party inside. She took the chief's hand firmly.

"Come," she said again.

She led him across the lawn to the garden gate. She pulled him through it, and on down the path, stumbling over the borders.

The garden was very dark, and the apple tree at the end loomed high and strange. She guided him to it.

"Great minds run in the same channel," he said a little guiltily. "You—you wouldn't prefer to go somewhere else?"

"No," said Sally Belle firmly, "we have to sit here."

She sat down on the soft damp grass and he sat beside her.

"Take off your mask," she said. She untied her own mask with steady fingers and laid it on the grass with Pete's.

"Light a match," she ordered.

"Oblige a lady," Pete agreed.

He fumbled for his box, struck one match that went out, and another that flared high. He held it up and looked at her. She saw his smiling face, pale in the dark, with the eyes very bright and big. He stopped smiling and stared at her. He stared and stared. The match burned his fingers. He dropped it. He sat quiet, looking toward her through the dark, as if he could see her. Looking at her and saying nothing—Pete! She had read of minutes that were as long as hours. This was one.

"Ye gods and little fishes!" he said softly at last. And then, "Hell's bells!" And then, very softly and sadly, "Damn! Excuse my French."

"I excuse it," said Sally Belle graciously.

"You've got me," Pete announced; "you've got me right where you want me."

"Yes," said Sally Belle.

"Stung," said Pete bitterly, "by a kid like you. A small-town kid."

"Yes."

"I have to hand it to you," Pete admitted, "and I do. Here's where I get off. I'll go way back

and sit down. I know when I'm licked. But I won't apologize."

"You don't have to."

"You've got my number. I've had three girls on the string all summer, and kept them going."

"Three?"

"Three. Count them. I ought to know."

"Not—not ——"

"Lil Sewall. Yes. I didn't get far with her. Nobody could. She's cold."

"Do you think you got far with me?"

"Yes," said Pete simply. "I'm not proud of it, but I'm not ashamed of it either. You can't be young but once."

"No," sighed Sally Belle.

"I—I was writing to four other girls all the time. You might as well know it."

"Yes."

"I—I liked you the best of the lot. No use to tell you that now."

"No."

"It's true. If—if you cared to let bygones be bygones and—and start something—well, maybe I couldn't toe the mark—but I'd make a bluff at it."

Sally Belle received his offer in silence. The chief wriggled on the grass.

"Spit it out," he urged. "Call me down if you're sore."

"I'm not sore," said Sally Belle.

"You've got a right to be sore. I've done you dirt, and I'm sorry."

"What for?" asked Sally Belle.

"Fooling you."

"You didn't fool me. I fooled you."

"How do you dope that out?"

Sally Belle sighed. She hated to be unkind, and now she had to be.

"Pete, I knew," she said—"I knew all the time, from the very first night. I—I knew all about it."

"What?"

"You," said Sally Belle, "and Madgie and Lil—and the other girls. And pretending and lying. Excuse me, but you do lie. You"—she paused, recalling just the words that described him—"you're a cheap city sport."

"I am, am I?"

"Oh, yes," said Sally Belle eagerly.

"Would you kindly explain to me," Pete asked in

measured tones, "why you stood for me if you were on to me?"

"You have to act just the way you act. You have to lie and pretend," Sally Belle explained. "That was part of it."

"Part of what?"

"Flirting," said Sally Bele wistfully. She thrilled and sighed. "I wanted to flirt," she said. She choked down a sob and went on quite bravely: "I always wanted to and I never could. All the girls can but me. I've tried to, with you, all summer. I did the best I could. But it's no use. It's too hard. I've got to give up. I can't flirt."

"The deuce you can't!"

"I can't—I can't stand things like this."

"Like what?"

"This. Shut your eyes. Tight."

Sally Belle touched Pete's eyes with her fingers. They were shut. She caught up her mask and got up and stood beside him. She fluffed out her crumpled skirts; the cambric was quite limp. She was a fading rose, but roses died in a night. She was not afraid at all, but she was trembling all over. The trembling would not stop and her heart beat very

hard. She bent over Pete closer and closer. Their heads touched—their faces; that cold thing was Pete's cheek and the warm place was his mouth. She kissed him.

She drew back quickly. She was trembling still, but she ran quickly and lightly. She found the path. The dark hid her. She was safe.

"You kid—you cute little highbrow kid—come back here."

Pete had jumped up, crushing his mask underfoot. He stood calling her, there in the garden that had belonged to them both and never would again. How dark it was! Dark as a night without dreams.

"I don't cheat. Good-by," she said.

XIX

MAGIC MUSIC

DEAR HAROLD: I am well, and I hope you are well.

Sally Belle sat by her bedroom window, writing her letter to Pig. She had sat here ever since the party went home, but that was all she had written. The letter was hard to write, but it was pleasant to sit here, at her little new white desk, with two candles burning and the noise of the party all gone. She had on her silken kimono, pale pink, like a rose-bud just blown, and her hair was in two soft cuddly braids. Beside her on the desk was her pile of letters from Pig. The letters were all just alike inside, but how fast the pile had grown! She was saving her glass of milk until the letter was written. There was cream on top. She looked at it hungrily and wrote another sentence:

I have got something to tell you ——

Sally Belle was using her new fountain pen and dipping it in the ink. She dipped it again and read the words she had written—black, staring words. The ink dried on the pen. She wiped it and put it down. She went to the west window and stood there looking out. It was hard to tell Pig. She told Pig everything, and had meant all summer to tell him about her affair with Pete when it was ended.

"This is the end," she said aloud.

The words had a solemn sound that was very beautiful. Nobody heard, but a little wind was stirring the trees outside her window, as if it were trying to answer. Sally Belle leaned far out and listened and looked.

From this window you saw the garden; it was there, in the dark, waiting—her garden where she had heard Magic Music. Pete brought the music, of course. She heard it the first night he came. She never wanted to see Pete again. He was a cheap city sport. But the music was sweet. Where was it now? Asleep in the garden, where the sun slept at night? It was not dead. It was alive somewhere, out there in the dark, only she could not hear. If she could only hear it again—just once.

Sally Belle shut the west window. It was late. She went back to her desk and dipped her pen. It blotted, but she wrote on quite fast:

I have got something to tell you when you come back. It is too long to write. It is not very nice. I have been a silly girl all summer. I want you to come back. I miss you, Pig.

Yours truly,

SARAH ISABEL SMITH.

Sally Belle folded the letter into a square pink envelope and sealed it with her seal—a rose. She kissed the seal lightly once. It was the way she always sealed letters to Pig. It was rather a silly way, but Pig did not know about it. She drank her milk, blew out the candles, folded the rose kimono carefully over a chair, where she could see it next morning when she waked, and slipped into bed with the letter to Pig in her hand. She put it under her pillow. She was glad it was written, very glad.

She opened her eyes and sat up, staring wide-eyed at the dark. Her room looked just as it always looked; everything was in place, the kimono safe on

the chair, the white curtains waving at the window beside her bed. That window was open, but the west window was shut. No sound could come from the garden, but she had heard a sound, a small, clear, silver sound. What was it? It was like some one singing a very long way off, and very sweetly. She could not hear it now, only Pig's letter rustling under the pillow as she lay down again. It was a dream perhaps, but it was not like a dream. It was like—like ——

"Magic Music—Pig," whispered Sally Belle, half asleep. Then she turned on her pillow and slept.

XX

THE DREAM-TREE

The horse chestunt tree on the lawn looked very big in the dark.

There was no moon to-night. There were little stars, a few of them, struggling into sight too late when the town was asleep and there was no one to look. The stars were kind to the tree. It was an old tree now and it would not live much longer. The roots had been hurt when the lawn was plowed last year and this year the leaves had not been so thick and glossy and they were falling too early, fluttering down in scattering casual gusts. But the tree was splendid by starlight.

All its lost beauty and more came back to it and clothed it—dark magic beauty, waiting gracious and proud for eyes that could see it, for the clearest eyes in the world, the eyes of a dreaming child. Eyes that see more than they know that they are

seeing, and remember and dream of it through dreams they forget in waking, but live in the light of always. Beautiful dreams.

Dreams about cool still dawns and long sunny days, and short haunted twilights. Dreams of remembered songs and forgotten faces, and of the one face that lives in the heart when the other faces die. That face was there, in the dark of the tree to-night. It was there every night, but it was not quite clear there yet. Dreaming eyes could not see it yet, but they would see it soon.

The tree was a dream-tree.

THE END

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